

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

This India
With the 14th Army
I Go West
Chungking Diary
Oh! You English
The Pulse of Oxford
Out Of Dust

Novels:

We Never Die
There Lay the City
Just Flesh

Pamphlets:

For Every Thinking Indian
Karaka Hits Propaganda
All My Yesterdays

Compilation (with G. N. Acharya)

War Prose

D. F. KARAKA

NEW YORK WITH ITS PANTS DOWN

(17)

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BOMBAY.

"Washington is the capital of our Government but the real capital of this country, its heart from which flow the cultural and economic currents, is New York....It's unique, there's nothing like it anywhere else on the face of the earth—this great city of huge spaces that are too small, of millions of little people coming from every clime and country of the world, living in peace and happiness, knowing that their children will have an education in the most hospitable city in the world....."

Fiorello H. La Guardia
(former Mayor of New York)

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PREFACE

I HAVE been asked to write a preface to this book which I have truthfully read from cover to cover and more than once. I gladly do so because I believe the book will create a better understanding between India and America in this atomic age.

I have known the author, D. F. Karaka, for over thirty-four years. He is an erudite *pandit* (learned man) from Bombay and has one of the most non-violent minds in India.

At birth, his fond parent gave him as his first toy a Cuban *marracca* and the youngster is said to have cut his first teeth on a punch-bowl ladle.

Karaka received his early education in India where he learnt to read and write. He then went to one of England's best schools, Oxford. There he learnt how to speak English also.

He returned to India after completing his education in England. He was bewildered to find that his country had become one big caste system, which the British were trying to break down. But several leading Americans sympathized immediately with India, which gave the Indians a lot of encouragement. Among them were America's leading woman, Congress-woman Claire Booth Luce, who was also wife of Mr. Henry Luce; Mr. Phillips, one-time Personal Representative of the late President Roosevelt (*vide* Drew Pearson's "Daily Revelations"); Hollywood's leading star, Captain Melvyn Douglas, who in between visiting theatres—of war—gave the Indians a press conference in Bombay through the courtesy of the U.S.O.W.I. (United States Office of War Information) and said, "The *sari* is the most beautiful dress in the world," thus encouraging Indian women to keep it on; Mr. Louis Bromfield, who unfortunately arrived in India when the rains came and had to write his book sitting at home; Mr. Louis Fischer who summed up the Indian situation in a nut-shell; Mr. Edgar Snow of *The Saturday Evening Post* who gave Indians the status of being a "people on our side" like in a ball game, and of course the late Miss Katherine Mayo who after a brief visit to India felt a strong fillal urge towards it and called it "Mother India".

PREFACE

Not only among American writers and politicians has India found sympathy but among American industrialists as well. Well-known firms like General Motors, Firestone, Corn Products, and others were kind enough to open factories which have for years given Indians the benefits of the latest American products for which the American industry consented to accept rupees instead of dollars.

The U.S. Congress has also officially taken notice of India and a quota of 100 Indians are to be admitted yearly to the United States according to a bill, (now passed into an Act?) sponsored by Congressman Emanuel Celler of New York.

Encouraged by all this, Karaka decided to go personally to America and meet its great people, whom he had hitherto seen only on the movies that came to India through the courtesy of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Paramount, 20th Century-Fox, Warner's, Columbia and others who also joined in the general American move to uplift the Indian people and agreed to accept rupees in return for their services. Karaka's visit to the U.S. had been unavoidably delayed because of the general preoccupation of the U.S. with the war abroad and with the settlement of disputes with other countries like Germany and Japan.

In spite of all these difficulties Karaka reached the United States about a month before V-J day. He was in fact the only Indian War Correspondent in New York on the day of the first atomic bomb and was able to send an exclusive report to his paper in India by long distance cable and courier service.

It may be felt that Karaka has written this book with the idea of winning the Pulitzer Prize and bringing it to India. Nothing is further from the truth. "I only want a room," he said to the Reservation clerks of 57 New York hotels, "I have no further territorial ambitions in America." Karaka believes that America has fought for its freedoms and they should stay there. I mean the freedoms.

Karaka is a devotee of *yoga* and one of its leading exponents. In an earlier treatise he demonstrated to the British public the *yogic* trick of writing with his tongue in his cheek. Like most literate Indians, he does the national rope trick. He has also seen Mahatma Gandhi.

With the loosening of war-time paper control regulations in America, this book cannot fail to reach the 130,000,000 Americans for whom it is specially written.

Therefore, I have great pleasure in supporting the idea of reading D. F. Karaka's *New York With Its Pants Down*. It is the logical sequel to *For Ever Amber* and *Mother India*.

D. F. KARAKA

P.S.—As no one else would write the preface to this book I had to write it myself.

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HKS

I

ON GETTING A VISA

MOVING from country to country in war-time is a messy business and the shortest distance between two points is not necessarily a straight line. My country of exit was Britain, that of entry was the United States.

I had first to convince the British Ministry of Information that my visit to the United States was one "of national importance". This was essential in war-time. The British were very nice about the whole affair because in my case, being an Indian, they could not make up their minds to which nation I was of importance, so they just let me go.

"If the British have to give you permission to leave the U.K.", an official of the American Embassy in London explained to me on the phone, "we have to give you permission to enter America. Otherwise, what the heck are we doing in London?"

That sounded fair enough. I said, "Would you kindly give me permission to enter?"

"I cannot give you permission on the phone," he said. I said I'd take his word for it but he insisted on giving it to me in writing.

"All right. I'll come around. Keep it ready." I thought he hung up on me but you know how Americans are, always busy.

So I took a cab and drove to Number One Grosvenor (pronounced without the "s") Square, London W.1. I was wearing the full regalia of a War Correspondent. The American M.P., a sergeant with three stripes, was chewing gum at his desk. To call his attention I coughed three or four times, as is the English custom.

"Can't you see I'm busy?" he said in answer to my cough. He had in his hand a copy of the *Stars and Stripes*. I

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, about, that I probably went to the wrong girl or the wrong Embassy. The British Ministry of Information never gave any such letters. They were always believed. They hadn't written letters before and were not going to start writing them now. I shouldn't stand for such nonsense from the Americans, specially as the war was nearly over.

The next day I called again at the U.S. Embassy and queued up all over again. By now the sergeant was getting to know me and said "Howaya" with another fresh piece of chewing gum.

An hour later Babe came to speak to me. "Gotcher letter?" she asked.

I told her, though much more politely, what I had been asked to say.

"Get it into that dumb-cluck dame's head," Babe said in the threatening spirit of Potsdam, "no letter, no visa."

I couldn't resist it. I thought I'd promote a good fight like Mike Jacobs does all the time. "Maybe you should talk to her on the phone," I told Babe.

"But be careful," I added, "she doesn't think much of Americans."

"Whaat?" said Babe lengthening her vowels. She dashed into her room, picked up the phone. "Give me that British Ministry of Whatever-you-call-it," she said.

I followed Babe into the room and took a ringside seat near the telephone, so I could hear both sides.

Well, maybe there was no censorship, but . . . the things the two girls said to each other you would never say in Boston. I couldn't say who won. They sort of hung-up on each other.

By now it was July. Conferences and consultations followed the ill-omened phone call in which Babe played a leading part. Finally someone in some British Ministry certified something and all the Americans were satisfied.

The Babe at the American outfit had been more helpful than her British counterpart, so as I had only one box of French face-powder left from those I had brought as war-souvenirs from S.H.A.E.F., I gave it to the American Babe and got my visa.

It was a messy business, I mean getting the visa.

II

DOUBLE CHECK

BEFORE letting me into the United States, Babe, the female official of the United States Embassy in London, wanted fingerprints of all my eight fingers and my two thumbs. I think she got interested in me personally judging from the questions she asked and the notes she made on me in triplicate.

"Place of birth?" Babe asked in a matter-of-fact sort of way.

"India," I replied.

"India?" She didn't register.

"You know, where the Indians come from."

"Of course," she said.

I waited for the next question.

Bang it came.

"Race?"

"Indian," I replied not wanting to confuse her by telling her to which of the 243 races in India I belonged. The fact that there are 243 races in India is now more widely known in the United States and can be found in the authoritative Encyclopaedia; *Popular American Misconceptions*.

Babe turned the form over and ran through the list of races enumerated there. "Indian... Indian... Indian," she ran through the first column carefully but obviously it wasn't there.

"Indian... Indian... Indian," she was scanning through the second column. "Not there," she replied.

"What do you mean 'Not there?' There are 400,000,000 Indians in India alone and you can't just overlook that sort of stuff."

"Well, I see Negroes and Chinese but there are no Indians here."

I checked through the list myself. She was right. No Indians.

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"You go down under 'Other Races,'" Babe said consolingly.

"All right," I said, having no other alternative.

I thought I was all set, when she looked over the form and said, "I gotta know more about your ancestors."

I was getting impatient now. Firmly I said, "I have told you about my father, my grandfather, my great-grandfather. What more do you want to know?"

She got a little confused and said, "But whom are you descended from?"

I pulled out one of my horoscopes which I carried on me and turned over the pages. "You see," I said to her pointing to a portion of the Sanskrit script, "here is our family tree."

"Gee, that's summthin," Babe said, as if I had cast a voodoo spell on her.

She picked up her pen. I looked over to see what she had written. "Earlier ancestors unknown," she put on paper.

So I left One-Grosvenor-Square, just when I was getting to like the place. Back again at the Ministry of Information I was told I should now go to the Ministry of Transport, from where I was directed to the Ministry of Shipping, where I heard there was a ship, whose identity could not be disclosed but which was as big as the *Queen Mary*, and was waiting alongside an unnamed dock ready to sail and if I'd fill in another form I'd get my passage rightaway—on payment of £46 sterling for the passage and £2 Head Tax.

The Head Tax was an American protective tariff. This form, which the British official in a spirit of co-operation pointed out had nothing to do with the British, began unsuspectingly. It required the same details of name, father's name, age, date of birth, gender, height, colour of eyes, etc. That was the top series of questions.

The second row got more personal.

"Are you a polygamist?" it asked without warning.

I paused and thought. Maybe I didn't understand the word; maybe I should look up the Oxford Concise Dictionary and check its correct meaning. The British official looking over my shoulder helped me out. Yes, that's what it meant, he assured

me. "Hell," I said to him, "I'm satisfied with one at a time."

The next question was devastating. "Are you an anarchist?" it asked.

"Not unless I am provoked," I thought.

But this was no time for levity, so after some careful introspection into the state of my mind I said, "No."

I paused and thought. I was thinking aloud when I said, "What would Stalin say to such a question and how would he get into the United States?"

"On a diplomatic passport," said the British official with the look of a man who was going to vote Labor at the next election.

I turned to the next question. The U.S. wanted to know plenty more. Had I at any time been in a padded cell? Was I screwy right now? I knew I wasn't when I began filling in the form, but frankly, in fairness to all concerned, I said to the British official I'd like a re-check.

There was one other shattering question, "Do you believe in the overthrow of the United States Government by violence?"

"Of course not," but the question was superfluous because anyone who said "Yes" to this would already have said "Yes" to the insanity question.

Probably because of Mahatma Gandhi, I was not asked whether I believed in the overthrow of the said Government by non-violence.

With all these questions duly answered, finger-prints in hand, my passport chopped, I was on my way to America.

III

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICA

ON board we were told we were on the *Queen Elizabeth* and that its war-time code word had been "Queen Bess". It was just to fool the Germans.

The *Queen* carried about 15,000 U.S. personnel, 14,950 male and 50 female. The women had an anxious time because there were sharks in the Atlantic. But every corridor was guarded by M.P.'s with purple hearts, so no untoward incident could happen on board and the only swell the girls complained of was of the ocean.

Outside my cabin on the Sun Deck, there were three M.P.'s with whom, before the voyage was over, I became extremely friendly. When they heard this was my first trip to the United States, they were determined to give me the low-down on America.

I supposed I was going to be told about American thought and opinion which I had come to study in my more serious moments, but they had other views on the subject and one of them came straight to the point when he said, "You don't have to worry about no dames in New York. Stick your uniform on and you're O.K. See?"

"Oh!" I said.

"Keep your shirt on. Never can tell with those babes."

"Oh!" I exclaimed again, unable to distinguish between what was idiom and what was directive.

"It's easy," he assured me. "You just walk into a hotel, see? You tip a wink to the clerk and say important-like, 'I wanna room with . . .' Then you go up, see? And they send the babe to you. It's easy. Boy, are they waiting for me?"

"O!" I said dropping my h's. But to myself I kept repeating the formula, "I want a room-with . . ."

The thing I noticed about the three M.P.'s was the marked difference in their physiognomy. One had a nose which made me feel sure his name must be Cohen. I was wrong. It was Isaacs. The other was dark and had a distinct Italian accent. He was American, he said. His name was Toni Rosetti.

"But aren't you Italian, really?" I ventured.

"That makes no difference. All is equal in America. No difference."

"But, Toni, how do you become an American with an Italian accent?"

"Look, mister, accent don't mean nothing, see. When you get your papers, you are American. You stand on your constitutional rights. My father he came from Italie. I was born in America, so America belong to me, see. Any guy who say it don't, I punch his nose."

"Have you ever seen Rome?" I asked Toni.

"Naaw. But it ain't nothin like Nooyork."

"I think you should wait till you see St. Peter's, the Sistine Chapel, the Capitol . . ."

"We got a Capitol too. In Washington. It cawst plenty."

"But you wouldn't get the same feeling. You wouldn't be able to look over the Palatine and see Rome on the Seven Hills and hear the echoes of Cicero's speeches . . ."

"Look mister, that's a lot of mush. Don't mean nothing to me. These Italians talk."

I gave up.

The third M.P. appeared much more American. He was blond and probably from Texas. He looked dumb.

"I didn't get your name," I said, though I'd never asked him what it was.

"Astor," he replied coldly.

I was startled. He was only a private first-class and I knew democracy hadn't stretched that far.

"You don't mean *the* Astors?"

"I dunno," he replied unhelpfully.

"I mean, are you from that well-known Astor family?"

"I guess they all know pop. He has a drug store downtown."

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Then I realized the mistake was mine.
Isaacs M.P. who hadn't said much intervened, " You're
mixing up with those relations of that English Duchess who wants
prohibition."

"Lady Astor," I helped him out.

"Yeah, that's the dame," said Isaacs.

"Kinda high class," said Toni, not wanting to be left out.

"Plenty of dough."

"My pop got dough too," said Astor jr.

"Yeah, but different class," said Toni.

"Yeah," said Astor jr.

"Yeah," said Isaacs M.P.

"The other Astors were fur-traders or something?" I asked.

"Yeah," said Astor jr., "different class."

It was late and I turned in for the night. As I undressed, I
could hear them discuss me.

"Educated guy," said Isaacs.

"Yeah," said Astor jr.

"Fancy talk," said Toni.

"Yeah," said Astor jr.

"Yeah," said Isaacs.

"Yeah," said Astor jr.

IV

ROOM SERVICE

NEXT morning land was sighted. I came up on deck and got my first glimpse of the new world which was America. Gradually the landscape came nearer and soon Manhattan stood before me.

I saw the Statue of Liberty for the first time. She was covered in green.

Not long after, we landed. I stepped ashore after the General's party.

Then I saw Marlene Dietrich for the first time. She was covered in khaki.

A brass band was playing some kind of a tune. I tried to catch the words from the boys on board who were singing it. I think it was called "God Save America" or something like that. In all the noise and excitement it was difficult to tell.

The formalities of customs and immigration were soon completed. Outside, I tried unsuccessfully to hail a taxi.

A Red Cross woman driving a van offered me a lift. I gladly accepted. I checked in at the St. Fregis.

"I want a room-with," I said to the clerk at the reception desk, remembering the formula.

"Certainly," the clerk said. "We have got everything ready for you."

I was pleasantly surprised. The formula had worked.

In the elevator, I wondered whether I should have given any other details of my requirements. Should I have signified any preferences? Would they send me an *a la carte* to choose from? The hotel looked as if it had taste.

I waited for sometime in my room, unpacked my suitcases and settled down. No one came up. Finally I picked up the telephone and said, "I am expecting something... eh... to come to my room."

"You want Room Service, sir."

The Americans have a department for everything. Room Service! How subtle that was! We didn't have that sort of thing in India. "Room Service, good afternoon," said a sweet little voice. I really didn't know how to put it. It was difficult to ask her what she looked like over the telephone.

"What is this room with?" I asked.

"With bath, sir. No extra charge."

"O!" I said.

"You're welcome," said the voice of Room Service.

But everything in this hotel was so nice and cordial. Each time I picked up my telephone a gentle voice said, "Order please." You'd hardly tell the lady of your requirements when it was already on its way.

How different it was from India, where a telephone conversation ran something like this:

"Allow! † ... Allow! ... kon hai? § ... allow ... allow ... what pliz? ... allow ... wrong number."

I remember the day I called up my own apartment in Bombay. I had a new bearer. I said it was I who was speaking. The bearer replied I was out.

"No, no," I said, "this is I myself, your master, speaking."

"Master gone out."

"Look here, you idiot . . ."

He was quite offended and cut me short, saying, "If you can't hold a civil tongue, I'll report you to my master."

I hung up in despair. Later when I returned home that evening I asked if there were any calls for me. He said there was one, "But the man was offensive, so I put down the phone."

I said I was that man. He replied with assurance it wasn't.

"How do you know?"

"How can you telephone to yourself?" my bearer retorted.

All that was way back, I said to myself each morning as free of charge, I was awakened by a voice which said, "Good morning. . . . it's 8.30." It was so different from the languorous East, where you'd tell Ahmed, the bearer, to call you without fail at 7 in the morning, and you'd end up by waking him at 8 instead.

† Indian For "Hello".

§ Indian For "Whoo dat?"

New York was different. The hotels in New York studied every requirement of yours and every effort was made to make one feel at home.

Part of this make-the-customer-feel-at-home idea was to be seen in the way a package arrived for me at the St. Fregis. When a package reached the hotel, marked for me, the Package Commissioner, a high ranking official of the hotel hierarchy, used to write me a post-card in which he intimated the arrival of the package at its destination, and invited me cordially to inform him at my convenience when I'd like it sent up. When I felt I was ready to receive it, I'd call up the Package Commissioner and make an appointment with him or one of his Secretaries, who would then take the elevator and deliver the package in person to me. On delivery I signed on the dotted line in the space marked "Guest's Signature."

"Why guest?" I asked.

"We invite you to stay here. All people staying in high-class hotels are called guests."

It was only when I got my weekly bill that I realized it was a dubious honour.

However, for those words of wisdom, you pay the modest sum of 25 cents to the Package Commissioner or his Personal Representative, and let him go before his meter ticks the next quarter.

The quarter was the unit of friendship. Why dimes and nickels were ever made, no one knows.

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dollars and thirty cents inclusive of all debts paid on account. With the remaining seventy cents I wrote an airmail letter to my people to tell them what an exciting time I was having in New York. Seventy cents for a half-ounce! Even the rope-trick pales into insignificance by comparison.

Speaking of the rope-trick I was constantly asked in America whether I had seen the Indian rope-trick.

"What do you mean, seen it? I do it," I said.
We all do it. It's very simple really and we, Indians, don't think much of it. All you need is a little rope. It is based on the principle of mind over matter, as when a naked *fakir* sits on a cluster of spikes. That's mind over matter, metaphorically speaking.

So, you take a piece of rope about two or three feet long and about half-inch thick. Then you coil it on the ground, having first cleaned the surface of the ground so that no particles of dust interfere with the transmission of will power on to the rope. Then you switch on your will power like you switch on the electric current. That's the rope-trick. There's nothing very extraordinary about it. We do it all the time for our children.

But while the rope-trick is just ordinary day-to-day life in India, there are many impressive achievements of our country which have passed unnoticed in America. One day the *Times of India* carried the news-item that one of our leading Princes had been graced with his 50th child. Yes, repeat five zero, as we War Correspondents say in our despatches when we think our editor may regard something as a telegraphic error. That was about two years ago—I mean the 50 score—so the figure is by no means final.

The Indian Prince in question had a number of wives, according to articles about him in the American papers. He was a rich man and could afford it, but fifty children was no mean achievement. Think of the rope he must have used.

VI

ABOUT PRINCES AND TURBANS

OUR Indian princes are a fascinating lot. We have the Rajah of Holkar (often pronounced "Whole-Cow" over the Networks), the Maharajah of Indore (like "Indoor" as in "Fun and Games"), the Nawab of Bhopal (like a G.I. in Paris or *beau-pal*), the Maharajah of Vizianagaram, (never pronounced at all), the Gaekwar of Baroda, not to be confused with the Gateway of India, the Aga Khan who does not live in the Taj Mahal as is believed in the U.S. and Rajagopalachari who is not an Indian Prince but the pet name for one of Mr. Gandhi's followers.

I once went to a party given by one of our better-known Indian princes. I was rung up by his Personal Secretary, the Odd-Jobs Man. He invited me on behalf of the Prince and such friends as I'd care to bring along. Being somewhat bashful I went alone.

At the entrance of the Palace (South Bungalow) I was received by four men in tuxedos. They looked all alike—I mean the four men. I didn't know which was my host. No one does. Without flinching I approached the Quartet. Then one of the tuxedos stepped forward and I said, "It's very kind of Your Highness to ask me to your charming party."

He said he was expecting me, so I realized he didn't know who I was.

It was one of the smartest parties I have attended. Champagne flowed as if it was only the water of the Ganges. There were more flowers on the dinner table than in the garden of Eden, more women and more stuffed birds than at a feast of the Borgias. The stuffed birds were good. The conversation was as sparkling as the wine.

"I hear there is a famine in Bengal," one of the guests said.

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"I never believe the newspapers," said the Prince. "I never read them. Never can find the time either. Get up too late. The evening papers are no good at all."

A trayful of drinks interrupted his thought.

A prominent industrialist, the kind of fastidious Indian who subscribed to *Time* and *Life*, said he had read that the British had built an aircraft carrier which could take more planes than there were in the whole of India at the outbreak of the war.

"That's nothing," the Prince intervened. "I hear from my sources that the Americans are building a battleship three miles long."

It was definitely a scoop over the United Press, who were always scooping. The Prince amplified his statement by saying, "The Captain will go up and down in a jeep."

The war, as everywhere, was the main topic of conversation. The Prince told us how his State Army had already been increased four hundred per cent. and very soon the first regiment would be formed which would go straight into training. "Our soldiers are very serious fighters. They are determined to stop the Japs from entering our State. As we are in Central India we have plenty of time for training."

It was because of some impression in the St. Fregis Hotel that I was an Indian prince travelling incognito as a British War Correspondent, a heavy disguise for any Indian Prince, that I was rung up one morning by the Famous People's Photo Service and Press Agency Inc.

"Good morning, sir," said a strange male voice.

"Good morning," I replied.

"We hear you have just arrived in this country from India."

"That's right."

He proceeded to tell me who he was. He was President of the above-mentioned company and was sending a man specially to photograph me for all the American papers. They did this to all distinguished visitors, he added.

"But . . ."

"That's quite all right, sir."

I gave in. The man had really rushed me into it. Into my uniform in fact.

Round ten o'clock there was a knock at my door. As I opened it, I was knocked down by a burly man with a camera who swept in like an Atlantic gale.

"Where's the Indian guy?" he said.

"I think I am the one you are looking for."

"No kiddin," he said taking the butt of a cigar out of his mouth.

"No kidding," I said.

A smile broke on his face. "I get you. In fancy costume. It's a good idea, but much better to wear a turban. Goes down swell in America."

I told him I didn't have a turban.

"No turban? Say, what kind of an Indian are you?"

"Well that's all I have. Take it or leave it."

I sat down and looked into the camera as I was told. He took two different poses, one smiling, then swept out of the room, saying, "I send you one dozen first. If you like 'em I send more. That's fair enough."

"Thank you very much," I said, because in spite of all the rough mannerisms of this man there was the kind thought of the President of his company who had found me in a great big city like New York and taken all the trouble to send a special photographer to take my picture. What's more, I was to get a dozen pictures.

I got the pictures too, so it was no practical hoax. A whole dozen as promised. I didn't count them till I found them charged on my bill. Only twenty-five dollars. Dirt cheap.

I looked in the papers for the next few days. My picture didn't appear. All sorts of Generals like Wainwright and MacArthur were taking up so much space, there was little room for anyone else.

Then one day all looked quiet. It was nearing a week-end. MacArthur had subdued the Japs, the hero of Bataan and the Corregidor had been duly honoured in Washington and New York, Henry Ford II had succeeded Henry Ford I, Adele Astaire had returned home after ten years of life in Eire, Britain had once again promised independence to India. Now was my chance. Just on that day Mayor La Guardia got the New

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York City Council to change the name of Sixth Avenue to Avenue of the Americas. That did it. I was out. Very soon I had lost my news-value.

VII

ON STEPPING OUT

ONE night I went to drown my sorrows at the El Moroso.
The El Moroso!

This was the place, I once said to myself in India, I must visit before I die. It was the smartest night-club in New York. "See the El Moroso and die" had always been my slogan, like people wanted to die after seeing Naples in the days of Caesar and Cleo.

I had a vision of the El Moroso even in my distant land, got glimpses of it from American magazines which strayed into our barbers' shops, because G.I.'s in the C.B.I. theatre used to have their hair cut in India. I had read about the El Moroso in gossip columns.

My host that evening was a well-known columnist. He used to write political pieces for a society paper. I had got a letter of introduction to him from a mutual friend who had marked the letter "Top Secret" because Grew never read anything which wasn't so marked.

At the entrance to the El Moroso stood a Spahi who spoke with a perfect American accent. "Goot heevening," he said, "Welcome to the Hell Moroso." It was just his way of saying it.

"Amazing man," Grew said to me, "played ball against Yale."

"What is he doing in that silly dress opening taxi doors?" I asked.

"My deah felloh," Grew put on a special English accent for my benefit, "some day you'll realize it's not just anybody who can rise to become doorman of the El Moroso."

We entered through the swing door. I checked my cap. It was only a beret and I had paid enough quarters to get it back from hat-check girls. At first I thought I'd slip it into my pocket

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just this once and save the quarter, but I remembered I was at the El Moroso where that sort of thing just wasn't done. I resigned myself to paying another instalment and checked the cap.

We entered the ballroom. A waiter in a tuxedo, carrying, for some obscure reason, the honorary rank of a Captain, greeted my friend.

"Good evening, Sir. Alone tonight?"

"Just two," Grew said almost apologetically.

"I feex a special table for you immejetly. On this side."

"Thank you, Marinov. When you are ready."

There was a slight commotion. I saw them bring a whole table, lifting it bodily, from the other side of the floor to our side. Already there were so many tables on our side that we were in the middle of the floor. There were a number of empty tables on the other side.

I asked Grew why we didn't sit on the other side.

"Good God, no," he said in an undertone, "I'll explain later."

He waited for the Honorary Captain to withdraw from our vicinity. Then Grew said, "No one who is anyone in New York ever sits on the other side of the floor. In fact that's why I asked you to put on your uniform. Of course they know me here."

I looked at my uniform. Made by Kilgour and French of Dover Street, London, W.1., with the shoulder badge reading "British War Correspondent," with a flash of the 15th Army Group given me personally by four-star General Mark W. Clark, this uniform which had just shaken off the dust of Italy, France and Germany had given me just enough status to sit on the right side of the El Moroso.

O! Tempora, O! Mores, as the Greeks said. (*Book of Popular American Misquotations.*)

I lit a cigarette to regain my lost composure. Almost frightenedly I inquired, "But who decides whether one sits on this side of the floor or the other?"

"It's all up to Marinov."

"You mean a waiter decides my social standing?"

"My dear fellow, you must never refer to him as a waiter. Waiters wear a white jacket. The tuxedos are Captains."

"Captains!" I thought of all those poor guys who had gone to Italy, Germany, France, England, India, China and Burma to fight for democracy and who returned as they went, buck privates.

Just then Marinov passed our table. Grew said he was American, born in Russia. Marinov was talking to a real American Captain and his girl at the next table. He was abrupt to them. Marinov spoke English beautifully like a real Russian. His shirt was laundered.

"Do you think you could introduce me to him?" I ventured.

"Not the first evening," Grew replied.

"Suppose he doesn't remember me when I come here next? He may put me on the other side. That would look bad for the King's uniform."

"As we go out you give him two dollars. He'll remember you."

I felt relieved.

I began to look round the room. It was air-cooled and undefiled by smoke. You could see the faces of people clearly. It was only then that I realized why the place was called El Moroso.

Grew broke the silence, "Here you see the cream of New York."

I looked at the women in silver foxes in whose direction he was looking. "Cream of Society," I breathed to myself as I glanced down her *décolleté* dress. She was obviously Grade "A" from Park Avenue, though her face didn't look as if it had been washed in the milk of human kindness.

Grew confirmed she was Park Avenue, where some of the best women were kept. She was Social Register, of course. "To be in the Social Register" is an American expression meaning "doing what they say others shouldn't." It was the Fifth Freedom, like the Fifth Column.

Just then another woman walked into the room. She wore a dress which Grew said came from Bergdorf and Goodman,

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where all the women go while their men are in love. She wore a silly little hat with bananas and daisies stuck on it.

"And that's John Frederics," Grew said.

"The man with her?"

"Good God, no. I mean the hat. The man is Snozzleberger. He's got three large properties in the Bronx."

"Who is Snozzleberger?"

"I don't know, but he's always here. He's been trying to sit on the right side of the floor for years."

"Is he American?"

"Yes, of course. But not Social Register."

"Wasn't he born the right way?"

"No. He's self-made."

"But the girl," I said, "she's cute."

"Not bad."

"What's wrong? Isn't she cream of Society?"

"Skimmed milk of Broadway I would say. Just bits and pieces as it were."

"Best bits I ever saw," I confessed.

We stayed at the El Moroso for a good hour, by which time I was getting a trifle sleepy. It was nearly midnight. Grew was tired too. The next day the British election results were to be announced.

Grew asked for the check. The American Army Captain at the next table with his girl in an ordinary dress was also feeling tired. He had had the same drinks as we had. Just two Bourbons and soda.

Our bills came together. They were face-downwards. I offered to pay my share but Grew wouldn't hear of it. He looked at the check like a poker player drawing a middle pair in a straight flush. He gave three dollars. I didn't insist on paying my share since it was so reasonable.

The American Army Captain at the next table didn't get the same bill.

"Eleven dollars and thirty-seven cents," the Cap said to his girl friend.

"It looked an expensive joint," the girl told her Cap.

He read the items aloud. "Cover charge two dollars, minimum charge seven dollars, entertainment tax two dollars twenty-five, federal tax twelve cents. Total eleven dollars and thirty-seven."

That was odd, I thought. Being a member of the U.S. Armed Forces, (the guy that had fought for the Four Freedoms of America plus the freedom of a handful of other countries as well) I thought I'd tell him there must be some mistake. Our bill had come to so much less.

Then I remembered. He was probably not Social Register. And only Social Register folk got consideration these days because they had already made too many sacrifices in the war.

"No wonder they put the check face down," the girl said to her Cap. "It's ashamed of itself."

I bought my beret back for the usual quarter and left the El Moroso.

"Politics, no sir. Not for me. No future in it. Too much talk. I'm a business man. I make water faucets. Without water faucets you can't wash your face."

"That's right."

"One of these days I'm going to India when I have the time."

"Very glad to have you."

"Say, have you got hot and cold running water?"

"Yes, of course."

"Things are certainly moving over there."

"Yes," I said.

"You say you are an Indian—"

"Yes—"

"You speak English very well."

I didn't know how he could tell. "I find it difficult to understand Americans," I told him.

"Well, that's because we took the language from the God-damn English and put some streamlining into it. They still speak like that damn poet Shakespeare. But he's all dead and washed up."

"Mister, it sho is der language. Ya can't do nuthin 'bout dat," I said.

That shook him. He left.

"Isn't there any law in this country against molesting foreigners?" I said to the barman who'd been listening in to our conversation.

"He iz right. Too many religion in India. You zee. . . ."

"Check please."

Phew!

IX

ON BARBERS AND MANICURISTS

ATER that afternoon, one of the stickiest in New York, I went to the barber's shop.

Soon there was a barber ready for me. I stepped into the chair.

" Haircut?"

" And manicure."

" Miss Lizzie pliz. Manicoor pliz."

The barber's name was Mr. Bill. It was written on a card stuck into the frame of the mirror. Odd name, I thought.

" What's your first name, Mr. Bill?"

" Bill," he replied.

" Same as your last name?"

" No, no," he replied, pointing to the card. " It says there, see, Mr. Bill."

" Now wait a minute. What is your last name then?"

" Polsodski."

" Bill Polsodski."

" It's really Ivanov Polsodski, but in America, you know howitis, everyone say 'Howaya' and you no can say 'Howaya Ivanov Polsodski,' so I change to Bill. Now they say 'Howaya Bill!' It's more American."

" I get you. Like writers have pen-names, you have a razor-name."

" That's right."

" You not American?"

" Naaw."

" Foreign?"

" Yep."

" Where you come from?"

" India."

" You spik English so goot."

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"Yep, I learn faast."

"Yeah. I see dat. Better than me."

"Yep."

"Which India you come from?"

"The other one."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"You rajah?"

"No."

"No rajah?"

"No."

"You no fool me. I know one rajah. I cut his hair at Waldorf one time. He marry American girl. Of course now divorce. You rajah too."

"No, I elephant boy."

"That also goot."

Amazing what progress America had made in the few years of civilization she had. India was so backward.

Miss Lizzie came over, putting a page-mark somewhere in the middle of a big book she was reading. It was called *For Ever Amber*. The last time I saw amber was in Port Said, when the gullie-gullie men who sold "filthie" postcards would try and sell amber to you also. Birds of a feather, postcards and amber.

Miss Lizzie sat down on a stool and took my hand.

"You like America?" she ventured when I had stopped talking to Howaya Bill.

"Yes."

"You like New York?"

"I have just come out, so I like everything."

"Been sick or something?"

"Not exactly. You know how Army doctors are. Always think there's something wrong with you. Before you know where you are they make you screwy."

"You don't feel so good?"

"When I have a haircut I feel lighter in the head. And please don't make my nails too pointed."

"Maybe gun-shock," she said filing my nails down to the skin.

After the haircut, I had a shampoo, some friction, a little brilliantine. My check came to four dollars plus federal tax, fifty cents tip to the hairdresser, fifty cents to Miss Lizzie, but I got off cheaply with the fellow who put me back into my coat. I gave him only a quarter. It was the Federal Tax which was so unnecessary.

I had an appointment downtown with my agent. I took a taxi.

X

ON TAXI-DRIVERS

NEW YORK taxis are "the best in the world." "Best in the world" is just another way of saying they are American. They are also said to be the cheapest, though not in the world. When they are running, there is no waiting charge. The first quarter mile costs 25 cents, then only a nickel for every subsequent quarter-mile, a nickel for a two-minute halt. Of course, if you stop dead opposite the Waldorf, it costs you a quarter tip and another quarter for the commissioner who struggles with the door. This charge is not registered on the meter, but if you don't pay it, it is registered on the look on his face.

Because of the war, New York taxis were often badly shaken. Soldiers-on-leave generally used taxis. Sometimes the whole cab rattled.

I was in one of these rattling cabs, in a civvie suit. It was like a jeep on a Burma road. When I got to my destination, I said, "Some ride!"

"Whatzermatter, can't take it? Some of you should have gone to the war."

"Yeah! I did."

"Naaw!"

"Y-e-a-h."

"Which army?"

"Penpushers."

"Aw, not American, eh?"

"Naaw."

"Yeah."

I collected my change. It was hardly a collection. I tipped him a nickel. He looked at it, then glared at me.

"Whatzermatter," I said. "Can't take it? Some of you should have gone to the war."

"Ah! Cut out that fancy talk. You're American. You're O.K." He drove away.

When I finished with my agents, I took another taxi back to the St. Fregis. I was looking for trouble of my own accord.

"What do you think of Churchill's defeat?" I asked the driver.

"Whooodat?"

"I said what do you think of Churchill, you know, the British Prime Minister, being defeated in the British elections."

"Make no difference to me."

"It is a big victory for Labor."

"Whooodat?"

"I said it is a big victory for the Labor Party."

"Yeah, make no difference to me."

We didn't speak after that. I thought I had given him the right address, but I must have upset his train of thought, for he brought me to the Savoy-Plaza instead of my hotel.

"I said St. Fregis."

"Whooodat?"

"I want the St. Fregis Hotel."

"Why don't you say so in the foist place?"

"Sorry, my mistake."

"Make no difference to me."

Nothing ever did make a difference to him for he was one of those Americans who lived mentally on an island entire by itself. He drove his cab, paid his boss, paid his union fares and let the world look after itself. Isolationism!

Nor were these the only cab-drivers I met in New York. They'd recognize me, anywhere, by my quarters. I always gave a quarter tip.

I remember some of the drivers' names. Nicolas Diamante, Romanov Kapussho, Roderiguo Gonsalez, Benjamin Solomon, Sacramento R. Benedicto, Paul O. Roger, Matsuokuo P. Okinava, James L. Einstein, Frederico La Guardia, Thomas P. Dewey, Alfredo J. Arbizzoni, Mascarra de la Madrigas, Quinto de la Pampas, Samson L. Johnstone. They were Americans, they all said.

They were of different religions and different castes, but they all had one belief. They believed that a guy's gotta die some day, so what difference did it make if he died inside the cab or outside. The insurance paid. Sure, the Union fixed that. They were realists though, never believed in re-incarnation like the Hindus did.

With one exception, they all said that New York was the best city in the world and they would never go to any other city in the whole world. Not even Chungking.

The one exception, Romanov Kapussho, said, "New York is goot, but St. Petrograd it was mooth better."

"What are you?" I asked.

"I was a wite Rossian, now I am wite American."

"Why don't you go back to Russia?"

"Ah no! Everybody is too much equal in Rossia now."

Little equal, like in America, is O.K."

It was Johnstone who explained to me the intricate advantages of belonging to a Union.

"All cab-drivers belong to a Union, see. Like all telegraph offices belong to Western Union. Like you can send a telegram from any telegram office and it cawst the same, so any cab cawst the same, see. Everyone get equal chance, see. Kinda fair for all. The Union say dat. . . ."

This idea of equality was ingrained in the New York cab-driver. He was aware of his rights all the time. The Union had given him that awareness. One day driving right in the middle of a crowded thoroughfare, Dewey had to pull up because of a woman who was trying to cross the road and found herself right in front of Dewey's cab. Dewey was from Texas, where they don't stand for this sawft-dame kinda stuff.

The brakes worked. He pulled up right beside her. "Don't be afraid of moving your arse, lady," he said to her.

She moved.

He turned to me and said, "Staying there in the middle of the road like she owned the place."

"That's right," I said. "The road belongs to everyone."

"Yeah, but she don't know it."

It was Benjamin Solomon whom I asked, "What do you like about New York?" And Solomon said, "Nuthin. But you don't have to like the place. It's the best city in the world."

"Who told you that?"

"Everybody say that."

"Do you say it?"

"Look Mister, what I say don't count, see."

"So you wont talk, eh?"

"Naaw, not for nuthin."

There was wisdom in Solomon's words.

It was Nicolas Diamante who crossed the line about two inches when the lights were against him. I had picked him up at Park and 50th Street going uptown. The cop gave him the dirtiest look I've ever seen on a cop's face. Nicolas drew back the inch he had trespassed.

The lights changed. Nicolas grinded his teeth, put up his hands, started talking, partly to himself, partly to me also. "I aint done nuthin, see. Nuthin. Just crawsed de line. The sonofa bitch he tossed a doity look at me. I aint done nuthin. Nuthin."

"Maybe he doesn't like you, Nicolas."

"Yeah."

"You are Italian, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

"Do you find that makes a difference?"

"Ah, there's always some guy who don't like de Greeks and some don't like de Rumanians and some don't like de Russians. Maybe some don't like de Italians. Just boins me up."

"Maybe some don't like the Indians too."

"You Indian?"

"Yeah, from India."

"Then you got plenty of troubles, mister. Do they sit on you like they sit on me?"

"No one sits on me, Nicolas. I sit on spikes, see. And if I sit on spikes, I sit on anything else too."

"Well, you is different. But what can a guy like me do in New York. This is a bigshots' town."

"They say you've got real democracy here."

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"Who say? Didn you see that cop? Was he democratic?
Real democracy! Lotta horseshit."
'Horseshit' is the American equivalent of the Indian word
'Cowdung'. It is strong slang.
Nicolas Djiamante calmed down. "I guess it's O.K. cause
New York is the best city in the world."
"Who told you that?"
"Everybody says."
"*Voce populi!*" I said to Nicolas.
"You make me homesick," Nicolas said.

XI

AMERICANS WHO REGISTER AND AMERICANS WHO DON'T

BY and large, I was becoming more and more popular in New York. When I came to New York, I didn't know a soul. I worked up the hard way. Bell boys, then Bell Captains, elevator girls, an occasional nod from the Assistant Manager, when no one else was around for him to nod to. Now and again when I'd give way to a lady in the lift she'd say, "Thank You." Like that I came to know quite a lot of Americans.

Being ambitious I improved in class every day. I had already been asked to dinner at the El Morocco, where John Perona sat at his Round Table with whoever important was in town, including Mr. Henry Wallace. Someone else had taken me out to the El Borracho, that lovely Spanish eating-house where on the ceiling you saw the lip-marks of elegant women and where in the Men's Room you saw yourself in a magnifying mirror. Beautiful joint. Everything Spanish. Not a single fly.

Those were the public places I visited. Gradually I made the grade. I was asked to a drink in East 80th Street. The East was the fashionable side of the town. East of Fifth Avenue, not East of Suez. West of Fifth Avenue is not worth bothering about. Of course, not everything East of Fifth is the real goods. The smart zone is bounded by Park Avenue and the two edges of the broad strip are cut off at 50th and 80th Streets. Between these is the Mayfair of New York. If you are asked to come up for a drink anywhere inside the area, you qualified to sit on the right side of the floor at the El Moroso. That was the real test—the floor of the El Moroso! "One day I'll make Park Avenue if I persevere long enough," I said to myself.

And that also came to pass with the Grace of God and the invitation of the Nuttals.

The Nuttals were super-duper society. They were in the

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"Have six eggs in the morning for breakfast," Peter said to me.

"Chicken or Pluver?" I aired a little familiarity with the rarer varieties.

"Nossir. Hen's eggs for me. Lay'em straight and fry'em straight."

"Yes, darling," said Beatrice with the adoration of an understanding wife.

It was a touching scene as the two looked at each other. He patted her fondly on the hand.

"Best wife I had," he said to me. Then to her, pinching her on the cheek, "My little poopsie-woopsie Betty Boop."

These were no swear words, as I first thought. They were words of endearment.

"Best wife I had," he said. He had been married twice before.

Beatrice was not as dumb as she looked. She was surprisingly well read. She had read *Mother India* and knew all about my country.

"Tell me," she said. "Are all the men in India naked *jakirs*?"

"No," I said playfully. "Just as all the women over here are not for ever Amber."

"For ever under, you mean," Peter said. "Captain, fix us with some drinks. We're dry."

"But do tell me all about India. I hear it's simply thrilling," Beatrice said.

"Yes." I smelt trouble.

"Do you have to remove your slippers every now and then?"

"Only on Tuesdays," I said, for Scotch beyond a certain point makes me playful.

"Isn't that wonderful? Just Tuesdays. Are they sacred?"

"Yes," I said, knowing I was in for it.

"Must be lovely out there. Every day the glorious sunshine. Or is it just unbearably hot? I am told some people wear icebags as hats because it's killing in the summer."

"Browns us off," I said, but she wasn't familiar with that English idiom.

"How do you keep cool in that terrible heat?"

"We drink ice water."

"Yes, we cool water in *chattis*."

"In, what?"

"*Chattis*. They are earthenware mugs with thin necks and large bottoms in which we put the boiling water, so as to make sure all the germs are killed. Then the water stays in the *chattis* and the cool wind blows on it and the water gets quite cool."

"How beautifully primitive and exciting!"

"But now we've got a new device to cool water."

"Yes?" said Beatrice.

"It's like a large white box, almost like a cupboard. It has got all sorts of knobs inside. You can put bananas inside, and oranges and even pieces of fish and soda...."

"You mean soda water?"

"Yes, that's right. All sorts of things are put into this white cupboard. You can even put meat in it, that is if you eat meat. And then there are some trays in an inner space in this big white cupboard."

Beatrice followed me closely.

"And in the safe-deposit part of the cupboard there are little square partitions. You put water in them and slip the tray in and after a few hours the water becomes ice."

"You mean a Frigidaire."

"That's the name."

"Frigidaires in India! I'd never have believed it."

There was a long silence after that. Everyone was feeling tired and even the proteins were wearing out in Peter Nuttal. So we went home, the Nuttals to their apartment in Park Avenue and I to my hotel, St. Fregis. When the Bell Captain gave me a special greeting that night I knew it was only because I owned a frigidaire. I was on my way to bigger things.

XII

LOUIS FISCHER AND POLITICS

THE next day I heard from Louis Fischer, author, journalist, political thinker, lecturer. I had been trying to contact him for several days. Louis Fischer was an intellectual sky-scraper. He had gone specially out to India to stay a week-end with Mr. Gandhi in the latter's grass hut at Sevagram and had studied the Indian problem from A to B. His books were banned in India because the British said his English was ungrammatical and it would spoil the whole literacy campaign on which Britain had spent a 150 years and which, because of the backward condition of the country, had only produced about 10 or 12 per cent. result. If Fischer's writings were made available to the Indian people, it would put the clock—Big Ben—back for a long while.

I had missed seeing Fischer in India, because in that weekend he had so much to do. He had to see Gandhi, Nehru and the Congress leaders. He met all the Untouchables of course, to get a correct idea of the caste-system. He didn't have time to meet the 90,000,000 Moslems of India, but he met Mr. Jinnah, who spoke for all of them, including himself. He was one of the best informed Americans on India.

Fischer told me there was a meeting of the Liberal Party of New York to discuss the meaning of the British Labor victory and if I turned up at the Hotel Commodore that evening I would get an idea of a really intelligent, forward-looking, progressive American audience. This interested me very much because I was always on the look out for those people and they were damned hard to find.

I thanked Fischer very much for the opportunity and that evening I arrived at the Hotel Commodore punctually at 8 o'clock which was the time of the meeting. The ballroom was crowded, the women outproportioning the men. There was an air of in-

formality about the whole meeting and men rolled up the foyer and rolled up their sleeves, drinking ice-water, buying important pamphlets written by important members of the party on important matters of world interest.

PACIFISM OR THE ATOMIC BOMB?
ARE WE GOING BACKWARD OR FORWARD?

TIME FOR DECISION.

60,000,000 JOBS ARE NOT ENOUGH.

AREN'T REPUBLICANS REALLY ANARCHISTS?

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE?

THE CHINESE ARE NOT ONLY LAUNDRYMEN.

MORE HUTS FOR INDIA.

These were the more serious pamphlets. There was lighter reading too: THE JEWISH PROBLEM, STALIN, A WEEK-END WITH GANDHI.

I went with an American girl to this meeting. She felt a little uncomfortable because she was wearing a Carmen-Miranda hat and this was a serious sort of meeting. Everyone was in their place by 8-10 except the speakers. At 8-15 the audience had settled down. The first applause broke out at 8-20. They applauded again at 8-25 and 8-30. The speakers walked in at 8-35 and the meeting began almost immediately.

At the High Table there were about 18 of New York's leading minds. A man in a grey suit took the Chair. He tinkered with the microphone and midst applause said, "Friends." He captured the hearts of the audience straightforwardly. He explained briefly what the meeting was going to discuss. In America this sort of meeting is called a convention, because it happens all the time.

"I don't know why I have been asked to take the Chair tonight," he said and his words were greeted with applause. "There are so many abler men than I." (Applause.) He went on to explain the purpose of the meeting.

Then came the main speaker of the evening, who had specially come all the way from Canada, because with all their self-assurance, Americans like being re-assured by members of the British Empire.

This speaker was one of the most powerful speakers I have ever heard. Why he needed a microphone I don't know. His

hands gripped the edge of the table. He spoke to both sides of the audience and held the attention of the ballroom from end to end.

"Friends, (Applause) I don't know why I have been asked to speak first (Applause) or to speak at all." (Loud and prolonged laughter.) (Applause.)

Americans like this light human touch. They were very amused because they knew all the time he liked speaking first and speaking at all.

"There are many well-known figures here (Applause) who are better qualified to speak than I am (Laughter) and I am surprised that I should have been asked, being a Canadian, to address the Liberal Party of New York." (Applause).

His apology for being a Canadian was construed as a direct hit at the British Empire and the Americans like that sort of thing, because the Americans don't see why Britain should have an Empire when the Americans haven't.

"But, friends, it takes all kinds to make a world," he continued. (Hear! Hear!)

I looked around the room. Yes, he was right. It took all kinds to make the Liberal Party also. Sitting one seat away from me was a colorful man. He was dark of complexion, darker than any Indian I've seen. Americans from the South came like that, because it is hot down south, but they were Americans really, all part of the same pattern of Democracy. Ever since the late Abe Lincoln said, "All Men are created equal," the Americans are one people. America is true democracy with four freedoms, one for the whites, one for the blacks, one for the Jews and one for the rest.

This colorful man was dressed to match. He had a dark brown suit, the trousers were a little unpressed though. He had a straw hat like the ones M.G.M. used in the *Show Boat*. He wore a bright red tie, knotted to about the size of a pea. He had a vivid green and white broad-striped shirt.

The odd thing about him was that he was lurching on one side, because it was kinda late for him and the hotel situation in New York was getting so bad, people had to go to public meetings to catch an hour or two of sleep. The girl next to me

was very worried because she thought he'd fall on my lap any moment. But the man Sambo always regained his balance just in time to avoid falling on my lap. Now and again he'd wake up, look up at the speaker, see he was still speaking, then shut his eyes and relax again. What worried me was not that he might fall on my lap, but that he should be a somnambulist and walk out of the hall in his sleep. That would have looked very bad.

In the row behind me was a strange looking girl drawing what appeared to be surrealistic pictures. I turned round tactfully and looked at the strange girl. She looked like Katherine Hepburn, only more washed out. She had hair which fell straight like the Jacobbeans. She had a look in her eyes like Eddie Cantor after he had been kissed. She had the mannerisms of Garbo and I think her mind worked in circles like Laurel and Hardy, because she was drawing circles on a large piece of paper. Just plain large circles. But out of these queer circles some sort of a pattern was emerging, the sort of modern art in which it was difficult to tell which was the up-side and which was down.

This girl was probably mapping out the programme of the Liberal Party, or she was a surrealist or nuts. Whatever she was, we found her fascinating to watch.

The speaker from Canada went on. He was saying, "Without Labor, Capital cannot survive. Without the nationalization of the means of production, distribution and exchange...."

We turned to look at the progress of the pen-and-ink drawing behind us. The strange girl had put into the bigger circles little inner circles, which were probably eyes, or were they eggs, suggested by the speaker's remarks on production. It was difficult to follow the girl's ideas. She was decidedly a cut above the ordinary and definitely liberal in her expression.

The speaker had made a passing reference to wage increase as a means of stabilization of the standard of living. But to the American Liberal Party of New York, all this was commonplace. They could talk political philosophy with the same non-violence with which Gandhi talks civil disobedience. It was the result of a very high standard of education in the United States. "Education" was a fluid word often used in the same connota-

tion as the English word "literacy."

I was getting most interested in art as it was progressing behind us. The strange girl had completed her design. She turned it round and round, looking askance at it from all angles. We too got different views of it. It was really remarkable, because it was as M.G.M.'s motto says, "*Ars gratis artia*", which is Latin or Greek for "Art for the heck of it." ELAS-Greek, more likely.

Then a strange thing happened which took our breath away. The girl started unscrewing the bottom of her fountain pen with which she had been drawing. She then squeezed drops of ink on the pattern and carefully, with her second finger, smeared it all over the design till the whole thing became one mass of blue-black. It was a wonderful idea.

"She obviously is a born American," I said in a whisper to the girl with me, so as not to disturb the Canadian who was still speaking.

"How do you know?" my friend said gamely, always ready to buy it.

"Well," I said, "we foreigners can never get an entry permit into the United States if at any time we've been screwy."

"Yotte," my little friend said in her characteristic fashion. That's why I liked her.

The Canadian sat down amidst deafening applause.

"Let's go," I said, taking the chance of slipping out between two speakers.

"But it's only 9-10," she said, though she followed me unreluctantly out.

Just then we heard the next speaker announced. I didn't get the name, but he was President of the Union of Sleeping Car Porters. At first I thought it was "sleeping Car-Porters, but that was obviously the colorful gent sitting next to me. The present speaker had the hyphen between the "Sleeping" and the "Car."

I didn't stay to the end of the speech of the President of the Sleeping-car porters, because he was speaking with a peculiar accent and a voice that came through a fog-horn. He looked very browned-off. He said he was mighty glad Labor had done the

trick in Great Britain. Yeah man. It was a mighty good thing for the whole great big world and the Sleeping-Car Porters were mighty glad of it. It sho was summthin and "We Americans" (the phrase was the President's) kinda hope that British Labor kicks the gong around for a long time. I liked the phrase " We Americans." It was like " I Claudius."

After the strain, we went to the Copacabana, where the orchestra played tunes by a new composer, as well known as Gershwin. His name was Calipso. He was from Trinidad from where Minnie came.

At the Copa, as it is more affectionately known to its devotees, there was a brilliant man by name Joe E. Lewis, not to be confused with the guy who goes socking people on the jaw. This was Joe E. Lewis, an entertainer. Joe said he had graduated with a D.D.T.—Doctor of Delicatessen. It was the most sensible thing I heard that day.

2100
18.75
H6



XIII

INTRODUCTION TO HOLLYWOOD

I HAD always had my eye on Hollywood. I don't mean in the same way as a wolf looks on a babe or a pasha at a floosie. I looked upon Hollywood with respect. Long before American authors and writers thought of interpreting India to the Americans, long before the late Mr. Roosevelt thought it worth while sending a Personal Representative to India in 1942-43, long before American newspapers printed the statements of Mr. J. J. Singh, President of the India League in America and one of our many Singhs, it was Hollywood which, through the powerful medium of the silent and speaking motion pictures, presented the Indian scene to the Americans.

Periodically it would revive American interest in India as with *Elephant Boy*, *Clive of India*, and *Bengal Lancer*. There was in the making a great Indian picture, equivalent to Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, which had to be shelved because of the war. This was to have been a picture of the Indian masses. It would have also explained the caste system and the rope-trick. It was provisionally entitled *Rajah*, just so that everyone in Hollywood would know that it referred to India. It is believed that the script was to have been entrusted to Katherine Vinson, but meanwhile she went and wrote something which upset Boston and no producer can afford to put out a picture and risk having it banned in Boston.

Boston is more than a state of America. It is a state of mind. Its favourite pastime is banning books. It is the most moral of all the states in the Federation. It's where all the upright Americans come from. It doesn't believe in love or sex. It tolerates infatuation. Marriage is an institution in Boston, not like in Reno, where divorce is an institution. Some of the healthiest people come from Boston. They usually wear red socks and play a low ball game, called debased-ball. A babe

Friday . . . Yeah come round lunchtime . . . Two o'clock . . . No I don't work Fridays. O.K. Abyssinia."

" Gee that was some surprise. Sam Taylor."

" Sam Taylor!" said Al.

" Yeah."

" The insurance guy?"

" Yeah. He's got a new dame."

" He's done very well lately," said Al.

Between Sam Taylor, the best steak in the country, the new dame and the submarine picture, they almost forgot about me. A number of other extraneous subjects crept into their conversation.

Finally Al said, " Guess I better be going. Have work to do."

" Okay," said Joe. " I'll fix up your buck private."

Al laughed. " One in a million," he said to me.

Joe was coy again.

" And listen, Wiseguy," said Al, " if this guy makes good, I want my cut. Don't forget I brought him here."

" We'll settle for a drink sometime," Joe said more realistically.

" O.K. A drink then. Who wants the money? Got more than I know what to do with."

" You said it," Joe said sadly. " I got the dough too but what the heck can I do with it? My children are just waiting for me to die. They see me once in a while and inquire about my health. Are you all right, papa? That's all I hear from them. And of course they touch me when I get soft-like. One gran, two gran—it makes me sick."

" Oh no, Joe. They're your children. They got a right to your dough."

" Well, don't I give it? I give plenty, see. What do I get in return? Nothing, see. Just plain nothing."

" That's too bad," Al said. " My kids are different."

" I know that. That's what burns me up. And I got more dough than you. That's what burns me up too."

" That's the mauwdern generation. They got no feelings like you and I had."

" They're just a lot of bastards," Joe said bitterly. " Yeah,

bastards."

"Naaw. You exaggerate. Yeah, you exaggerate," Al soled him.

"They got no use for me, Al. No use at all. The other day I says to Louis, that's the second boy, why he don't come up some week-end and stay with me. Says he's too busy. Then he calls me up, see. Round five o'clock in the evening, Friday. Says he'd like to come up and stay two-three days. I say fine. 'I've got a lady with me' he says. Lady! So I says bring her up. So they come round eight o'clock. Drives up in his big bus. You can smell them coming in before the door opened. High and stinking"

"Well, you know how these kids are."

"Wait a minute. The dame, he calls her lady, walks in, says 'Howaya pops' to me. First time I ever laid eyes on her. Howaya pops! Gee that burnt me up. I look at her and what do I see? She's wearing a dress that's cut so low I can see her navel."

Al laughed heartily.

"Aint so funny! Cause it's one thing being round a dame like that in town. You done it, I've done it. But to bring her to the house. That's going too far."

Al didn't say anything.

Joe barked again, "I said nothing, see. Nothing. Soon we sat down for drinks. He had one, two, three, just straight see. She had two. Same size. Then he poured, till a good half glass was full. So I looked at him. Just looked. He says whatzermatter, cant I drink in my father's house? Sure, I said. Drink. It's for you, son. He said if I'd known you aint got drink I'd have buyed her drinks at the bar. So I says, drink as much as you like. It's all for you. So he don't talk to me no more."

"After two hours he asks for food. Steaks! I give him steaks. Then they goes upstairs. So I says to him, quietlike, don't bring a dame like that to the house. It's all right in town, but not in the house. So he says if she's good for me, she's good for you. 'And you aint gonna get her either,' he says to me. It sho burned me up. Yeah. Can you believe it? My son. The

bastard."

" Ah, take it easy. Take it easy, Joe. Life ain't so bad."

" Ain't so bad, nothing. The bastard."

Al left and as far as I could see Joe Wise was still all burned up. I waited. Then he said to me, " Maybe it ain't so bad. What can I do for you? I know, I'll give you a letter." He pressed a bell. " Miss Cornie," he said on the office telephone, " Take a letter to our Script deoipment. Yeah. You know, one of our usual letters. Bring it in. I'll sign it."

XIV

POETRY, JOURNALISM, ET CETERA

WRITING in the U.S.A. is a highly specialized art. Whether it is a script, a play, a novel, a straight article or a piece of poetry. No one can tell what will go down in America. When a book is a raving success, you usually find it difficult to meet a single man or woman who has read it. So it was with *For Ever Amber*, a book that sold so fast that even the pages were hot. All Park Avenue had a copy of it, but no one admitted he or she had read the book. They bought it just the same.

It was the same with articles and poetry. One day I found a tree in Brooklyn. A tree all by itself. And under it was a young man with ideas. He had long hair. He was a poet. He was reciting his own verse. I stopped and listened. It was a poem on "Spring."

*Spring is sprung,
The grass is riz,
I wonder where de flowers iz?
Look, the boid is on the wing!
How absoid!
I thought the wing was on the boid.*

This was so new, so fresh, so different from the heavy stuff which English poets composed at the Atheneum in London during the lunch-time.

"I have another poem," said the Brooklyn lad.
"Let me hear it."
"Sure:

*Der were toity poiple boids boiping and choiping
And eating woims,
When up came Boitie with his gerl friend Goitie*

*And, boy, were dey poitoirbed!
To see toity poiple boids, boiping and choiping,
And eating worms."*

Journalism like poetry in America is free and easy. It is written to be understood by the masses.

One day I turned over a high-class American newspaper, the kind of paper all the Park Avenue folks read.

"Can't say folks," I said to myself.

"Why not, isn't 'folks' American?" I replied.

"Yeah, but folks come from Dixie or Pookeepsie, no folks ever live down Park Avenue."

"Why not?"

"Folks aint good enough to live over der."

"Who said so?"

"I said so."

I stopped. I was getting involved in an argument with myself. The point apparently is that "folks" is not used of "high-class" people and only high-class people live on Park Avenue, so folks don't live on Park Avenue. It's easy, if you get the right idea.

To go back to journalism. The paper I bought that morning was the New York *Herald-Tribune*, mouthpiece of the Republicans.

The *Herald-Tribune* is so conservative that it is against isolationism if that involves America. It supports democracy provided democracy means the right to attack the Democrats. It stands for greater co-operation with the British provided "British" means the titled gentry, and not of the impoverished variety. It believes that 60,000,000 jobs are unnecessary when machines could do the same work quicker and cheaper.

In that leading New York paper, appeared the news-item, "Lady Charles Cavendish Home After 10 Years of Life in Eire."

This is how it began:

At noon yesterday (i.e. September 20th 1945) Lady Charles Cavendish answered the telephone in her suite at the St. Regis Hotel, Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Fifth Street.

"Oh, it's you," she said. "Then I guess there's no escape.

But I haven't got my pants on yet. Give me five minutes and then come up."

Five minutes later Lady Charles answered the door, dressed in a plain dark suit and a white linen blouse. There was a shimmer of grey in her black hair. She was just as shapely and quite as animated as when she was Adele Astaire, the dancing partner of her brother, Fred. The phone in the offstage bedroom rang again.

"Fred," she cried. "How lovely." And later, "Hello, Bing, O, what a wonderful place this is." She told Bing Crosby she would be seeing him before the end of the year.

Lady Cavendish told her interviewer that Fred was retiring from pictures. "The doctor advised him to take it easy. You know, you can't dance like that forever. So he's going to rest for a while. Maybe he'll become a producer."

Lady Charles was "born the daughter of an Omaha brewer when the century was getting ready to turn." She left America in 1932 to become the bride of Lord Charles Arthur Francis Cavendish, second son of the ninth Duke of Devonshire.

The interview went on:

Lady Charles inherited from her husband who died last year, Lismore Castle, a large establishment dating from the seventeenth century, which rises above heavy copses on the banks of the Salmon River, in County Waterford, Eire.

The estate employs seventy workers who till and herd cattle on 400 acres, plant and cut several thousand acres of timber and fish the river. "We used to sell enormous quantities of salmon, but since the war they haven't been coming up the river like they used to," she said. "You trap them and hit them over the head. It sounds like a vaudeville act, but that's the way you do it."

Lady Charles left her mother, Mrs. Anne Astaire, a widow, to oversee the estate, a capacity in which Mrs. Astaire functioned during the last three years of the war, while her daughter was working at the Rainbow Corner, an American Red Cross Club in London.

NEW YORK WITH ITS PANTS DOWN

There Lady Charles wrote 8,000 letters for American soldiers, signed them all "Adele Astaire (Fred's sister)" and "honestly got that many replies." "You know," she said, "families love to hear about their sons from some one else. I'd like that 'Jack had his first glass of milk today and he prefers it to whisky any day.' I'd bring the milk from the Ritz.

"One boy from my home town got one down. He said he's heard his family talk about me. 'Your mother?' I asked. 'No, my grandmother,'" he replied.

Home for the first time in nearly ten years, Lady Charles found it "more luxurious than ever." "It is wonderful to see all the lovely girdles," she said. "You know our posteriors have spread quite a bit over there." In the thirteen years since she took her last curtain call with Fred in Chicago in "The Band Wagon," she has acquired a fear of audiences, she said, and will never perform again.

Henceforth, she hopes to live nine months in this country and the other three in Eire. "Ireland is a fine country if you do not stay there too long at one time," she said. "Lismore is a dream place. But if Charlie only knew how lonely it is there with no children."

That was the interview. I read it over and over again, studied the technique of putting human interest into girdles, posteriors and reproducing the atmosphere of an individual. If only I could get a similar opportunity, of interviewing some one I knew, I might also make the New York papers. I looked around.

In New York at that time there was Mr. Birla, one of the Birla Brothers. The Birla brothers used to ship goldbars like South Americans shipped peanuts. But Birla wore no turban. Some said he was a friend of Gandhi and maybe he'd have some news-value for the Americans. Some said Birla had a palace in which Gandhi stayed. Others said Gandhi wouldn't stay in a palace, unless the British deliberately put him there. Some said maybe Birla had only a grass hut like all Indians have, so what use was a grass hut to write about? So in the end Birla was out.

There was another Indian guy in New York who had a lot of factories in India making iron and steel and eau-de-cologne and oil and cocoanuts and electric power and aeroplanes and soda bicarb and other heavy chemicals. His name was Tata. He was nice kinda guy, but then again he wore no turban. It was true Pearl Buck bought him a lunch at the Waldorf, but Pearl Buck was doing that sort of thing all the time and even the Chinese were getting tired of it, so Tata had no news value.

"It's got to be a guy with a turban," a New York editor told me when I suggested an interview with Tata. "We know he's got a three-billion dollar plan," the editor said, "but a plan is a plan and who's going to pay for it? He aint got that dough. No one got that much dough. The Russians had plans too, but who reads about a Russian unless he were a Cossack? An Indian to be genuine has got to have a turban, see. You know, a turban."

I came back disappointed. The editor was right. All that the Indian industrialists got in the American press were a couple of paragraphs on the commercial page and no one reads the commercial page in America just like no one reads editorials in India, but you've got to have them just in case.

One day I called the Waldorf-Astoria and asked for "Information."

"Listen, miss" I said.

"Yeah. Make it fast."

"I'm a journalist."

"A what?"

"A reporter, newspaperman."

"Why don't you say so?"

"I want some information," I repeated.

"I aint tellin' nuthin cause it's against the rules."

"Be a good sport. I haven't eaten for two days. Got no story."

"Naaw?"

"Yeah."

"Honest?"

"Yeah. I am looking for an Indian rajah with a turban.

Must have a turban. That's important. No turban, no rajah."

"So what?"

"So have you got one in the hotel?"

"I don't know."

"You could look."

"It's against the rules."

"O.K. Then I don't eat one more day," I said pathetically.

There was a pause. She didn't hang up.

"Well?" I asked.

"Guess a guy's gotta eat sometime. I said nuthin, but there's a real one come in only yesterday."

"Has he got a turban?"

"Sure has."

"What's his name?"

"Now you're askin. We call him Rajah, that's all. He's awful cute. Gee he is. Say do you think he's married?"

"All rajahs are married," I said. "Two, three, four times. It's regulation."

"Aw. That's kinda tough on the guy."

"What is his room number?"

"I dunno. He's here but I ain't said nuthin, see, because the boss gets mad if he finds I told."

"What's his room number?"

"Ask for 25-G-H-I-J-K."

"What's that?"

"That's his room numbers. He's got a suite."

"Thanks," I said.

"I aint workin tomorrow," she said after a pause.

"Gee," I said, "that's too bad."

"Yeah, you rat." She punctuated that with a bang.

So I put on a real suit, rushed down the elevator, caught a cab and asked him to step on it, because I had to get a story.

American cab-drivers love driving reporters to the scene of a story. Drive he did. Like hell and fury. Eleven blocks in one traffic signal. He swerved here, there, everywhere.

I got to the Waldorf and got my man.

I came home and typed it all out, following the Lady Charles Cavendish pattern as closely as possible. I streamlined it,

INDIAN PRINCE AT WALDORF.

It began:

At noon yesterday, His Highness the Maharajah of Gopalachari answered the telephone in his suite (25-G-H-I-J-and-K) at the Waldorf-Astoria, Park Avenue and 49th and 50th Street. "Oh, it's you," he said. "Then I guess there's no escape. But I haven't got my pants on yet."

I explained I only wanted an interview and not a photograph.

"Give me five minutes to put on my turban and then come up."

Five minutes later Captain Singh of the 1st Gopalachari Regiment, A.D.C.-in-waiting to H.H. answered the door. I had entered the suite at the wrong end—"K", while H.H. personally occupied the "G" end. It was obvious—"G" for Gopalachari. The Captain was dressed in an immaculately-pressed khaki suit. He wore a fine khaki linen shirt with a silk tie and lisle socks to match. There was a shimmer of grey in his black hair.

Captain Singh led me through the rooms, explaining that because of overcrowding in New York hotels, the Waldorf were unable to give H.H. his usual accommodation.

H.H. had got into his turban when I entered the room.

He was just as shapely and quite as animated as when he was last in New York a year before the war. The phone in the offstage bedroom rang. "Sabu," he cried. "How lovely." And later, "How is my elephant boy?" He told Sabu he would not be seeing him before the end of the year as travel to Hollywood was still very difficult.

"That's Sabu, or is it Sergeant Sabu now? He was calling me from the set in Hollywood. He is making a new picture for the Ministry of Information and the O.W.I., called *How Indian Princes Won the War*. It will probably be Sabu's last picture. The doctor advised him to take it easy. You know you can't go on straddling elephants forever. So he's going to rest for a while. Maybe he'll become a producer."

His Highness who was the fourteenth son of His Late Highness when the century was getting ready to turn began reciting the

exciting adventures of Indian Princes during the war. "Simply wonderful record the Princes have. Not one single war casualty." He succeeded His Late Highness in 1932. He is the ninth Maharajah of Gopalachari.

From His Late Highness, the present Highness inherited the *gadi* (throne) of Gopalachari, thirteen of his brothers having died during His Late Highness's life, three obscurely of ptomaine poisoning. The *gadi* (throne) of Gopalachari dates from the 17th century and rises above corpses (pronounced without the "r") on the banks of the Ganges in the County of Gopal, India.

The estate employs 70 workers who till and herd cattle, except on Tuesdays which are sacred. There is timber on the large estate and fish in the river. "We used to sell enormous quantities of Bombay Duck, but since the war, they haven't been coming up the river like they used to," he said. "You trap them and hit them on the head like a vaudeville act, but that's the way to do it."

His Highness left his three senior official wives to oversee the State and attend to administrative business, if and when it should come up. His Highness functioned in an honorary capacity during the last three years of the war, as Chief Administrative Officer of the Free Canteen for British, American and Indian troops which the State of Gopalachari erected at the local station, which happens to be on the main line to the Burma front.

There, under the personal supervision of His Highness, 8,000 cups of tea were made and given free of charge to the fighting forces en route to the front. He told me that he had got several letters from American people in appreciation of this. "Americans love to hear about their sons being looked after in jungle places. A lady from Boston, which as you know is the intellectual centre of America, wrote, "Jack likes Bourbon. Never did care for tea."

Back to America for the first time after the war, His Highness found it "more luxurious than ever." "It's wonderful to see all these girdles," he said.

"Girdles?"

"You know our Indian women's posteriors have spread quite a bit over there. I have been commissioned to buy enough

stock for my wives and . . . you know how it is in India."

Henceforth, he hoped to live nine months a year in this country, preferably at the Waldorf if they could find proper accommodation for him. "Gopalachari is a fine place, if you do not stay there too long. It is a dream place, really. But if you only knew how lonely it is there with only three wives."

The ink had hardly dried on the interview when I rushed to one of New York's leading newspapers. I got there by cab. 80-cent ride! 20-cent tip. Dollar in all. I rushed through the mob of people gathered outside the building. Was I disheartened? The elevator boys were on strike. And the offices of the paper were on the 17th floor.

When the strike was over, the interview had lost its value. Fifth Avenue women had decided to wear turbans that fall.

XV

A TOUCH OF AMERICA

I GOT fed up. A guy's got to get a break sometime. A guy's got to eat sometime, as "Waldorf-Information" had said in her cute little way. Yeah, a guy's gotta eat sometime.

So I went to the Stork Club. I thought I'd combine business with pleasure. They say Walter Winchell goes to the Stork Club to get information from the stork's mouth. Thus Winchell had news before it happened, often months ahead. Winchell relied on the stork because the stork never took anything back. It only delivered.

This was my first meal in days. It told on me. Due to an irregular diet, I noticed something was wrong with me. I was talking American. Yeah, I kinda lawst my Oxford accent. Yeah, lawst it. But it'll come back. In India I had survived famines, epidemics, foot and mouth disease, colic and malaria. So what the heck was a touch of America?

Right then it bowthered me. But things would be different I knew, when I got back to my grass hut and took off my slippers, see. I'd sit on spikes on Toosdays and it's awful refreshing. Kinda strikes a chord and your brain begins to function.

I knew my father wouldn't get boined up, like Joe Wise had done, because no one gets boined up in India. We are used to the heat. And I knew the old man wouldn't call me a boisted either. Maybe he'd get sore cause after what he spent getting me to loirn English in Oxford, I kinda picked up this boisted stuff instead. But he wouldn't call me boisted. There aint no such Indian word.

Besides, as he said to me one day, resting at sun-set in our summer house, which is a hut of lighter straw, "Don't matter where you are son, you got 2,000 years of culture to pull you through."

But Americans don't understand that. They're kinda frightened of us like children are of the dark even when there aint nuthin to worry about. But they'd grow up in time. Children always do. 140 years don't make a civilization, see. But Americans don't understand that. Civilization has gotta mature, like wine. Money don't make a people civilized. Money don't mean nuthin. And we got money too, see. Why, when an American said to me what the Empire State building with its 83 stories cawst, I said, "Mister, it aint nuthin. We got a guy in Hyderabad who'd use it as a summer hut."

"Yeah," said the American, unbelieving like.

"Sure," I said.

"And what would he use for dough?" he asked.

"Gold," I said.

"Yeah?" said the American, more meekly this time. Much more meekly.

"Sure," I said.

Then I got more courage in myself and knowing how Americans like big talk, I said, "I'd buyed it myself and take it piece by piece to India and put it up again, like you Americans did before the war."

"Yeah?" said the American. "And what would *you* use as dough?"

"I'd use my letter of credit."

That fixed him proper because he didn't know what a letter of credit was. He didn't ask no more. His mind went on a lock-out strike.

I laid it on thick. I said, "But it's too old-fashioned. That's why I don't buy the joint."

"What's old-fashioned?" he was getting a sense of national pride working up inside him.

"The joint. It's only got elevators."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," I said, "We go up jet-propelled."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," I said looking at him straight in the eye-ball.

"No kidding?"

The poor guy died of unsound mind. An American jury said

so next day when they picked him up unconscious below the Empire State. The guy had no brains at all. He tried going down jet-propelled instead of going up jet-propelled as we Indians do.

I thought they'd give him a big funeral knowing he'd died in a good cause believing Americans could do what Indians did. But they'd had too many national parades lately, so they just planted the jerk.

Which reminds me. All countries got their customs. In India the Hindus don't eat cows because cows are sacred to Hindus. And Moslems don't eat another kind of meat for other reasons. Some Indians don't eat meat because it is untouchable. Some eat eggs, some don't. Some eat eggs only for breakfast. Americans don't understand that.

Indians don't eat grass. Spinach, yes. But not grass. Indians use grass for building huts. Housing has priority on grass. There's not enough left over. Indians eat birds, but only of some feathers. Not all birds. They don't eat peacocks, not even in curry. It's too much trouble pulling the feathers out. But Americans don't understand that.

Now some Indians don't eat shrimp, because shrimp is kinda holy. Now Americans think Indians are kinda screwy when Indians say they don't eat shrimp. What's wrong with eating shrimp, Americans say.

Well, shrimp is holy in India. Holy shrimp! Yep, that's right, like Christians say Holy Mackerel!

Indians don't eat spam, not even on Mondays. Indians like to know what they are eating. Americans eat spam because Americans can read advertisements. All countries have got different customs. Americans don't understand that.

Now Indians got their caste system like Americans got their caste system. Americans say Upper 400, Indians say High Caste, more than 400.

Indians have marks too, so they can tell who's High Caste. In America it's difficult to tell.

In India, High Caste folks wear three dots and a dash, worn from left to right. If worn right to left, it indicates naturalized High-Caste, not born High-Caste, like Americans have natural-

ized subjects. Canned stuff, not the real goods. Indians buy their way into our caste system like Americans buy their way in society. Indian rates are cheaper though. Much cheaper.

Indians have Lower Caste also. In India they're called Untouchables, like in America you have the Unmentionables.

But Americans don't understand that.

As Confucius said, "People who live in grass huts should not throw flares at others." And Confucius was right, as Pearl Buck will tell you.

Many Americans don't know much about India. Some don't even know where it comes from.

It's like one day when an American girl asked me, "How do you weigh in India?"

"In stones," I replied.

She looked at me in surprise. So I added, "Yes, stones. You know like rubies, emeralds. Why, the Aga Khan was weighed in diamonds on his Diamond Jubilee. True. Now I'm heavy. I weigh two whole stones. Big stones. We get them from the mountain on the other side of the hut. Just roll them off the mountainside."

One day the girl and I drove out of town. We hired a car and drove out on one of those rare days when the sun shines like in India. Nice warm feeling. We were driving towards Hyde Park where the Roosevelts have their ancestral home. We went via Pookepsie.

It was a nice fresh-air drive and I was speaking clean English again. The scenery was beautiful. There were beautiful roads and highways of colorful grey cement. There were some trees left because the war had held up the cleaning up of the jungle around New York. Things were on the move around us, chiefly cars, because the gas ration was lifted. And you could drink gas (petrol) if you liked, as Americans used to do in Prohibition days.

Suddenly, while we were chatting and she was driving, I saw a man selling peaches on the road. He had a vanful of them. He had brought the van along, parked it on the side of the highway, put up his sign which read, "Fresh Peaches For Sale."

"Peaches," I yelled with delight.

She pulled up the car.

What a size they were! They were the Mae West variety.

Now I remember buying peaches in London where they come at a dollar-fifty a piece. They would be wrapped in tissue paper, of course, but it made no difference to me because I don't eat tissue paper. Indians don't eat tissue paper.

So I said to her, "How many shall we have?"

"Oh, two dozen should be enough."

My heart sank. Two dozen at one dollar and a half, that's round 40 dollars, I thought. I almost felt as though I swallowed one when she mentioned two dozen.

But she was a nice girl and I kinda cared for her. So I said, "Make or break, two dozen it is."

The man who sold us the peaches was one of the real American types. Like the peaches he had grown up on the land. He was no Fifth Avenue stuffed dummy. He was America in all its rugged grandeur. He was the Grand Canyon, he was the wild West, he was Main Street, America. He was a grand guy.

He smoked a corn pipe. It didn't have that white spot which Dunhill's put on their pipes, just to make you feel only you've got the white spot till you find everyone else who buys a Dunhill pipe has one like it also. No, this American smoked a corn pipe. It hung from his lips like a drooping gladiola.

He sold the peaches to me in silence.

"How much?" I asked.

"Dollar twenty."

"How much?"

"One dollar and twenty-cents for two dozen."

I couldn't believe my ears. Soon there was a smile on my face. I said to him, "You should charter a plane, fill it with peaches and go to London and sell them over there. Then you can retire."

"Not for me. I stay here and sell here. This is the best country in the world."

"But you can retire here. You only go to London once."

"You come from there?" he asked.

"No."

"But you speak English," he argued.

"Yes," I said. "I do."

"Then wheredya come from?"

"India."

My friend was biting into a peach, one of the two dozen. 'Would he, a fellow American, know India?' she wondered. Yes, he knew India, for intelligently he asked me, "You come from the West?"

"Yes," I said. "Bombay."

The girl with me was very pleased. I'd just been pulling her leg about what Americans didn't know about India and here was one on the Pookeepsie Road and he could spot where I came from.

But it was a momentary feeling of pride she experienced.

"I come from Jamaica too. I been there," he added.

"But Jamaica is not India," I said.

"Sure it's India. It's in the West of India."

"No," I said. "Jamaica is not India. It's the West Indies."

"Well, I dunno, plenty of Indians over there. I been there."

As I said, some Americans don't even know where India comes from. Jamaica. Long Island. Anywhere.

XVI

MY EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS

AND while writing about New York, let me tell you about Washington. Because if Washington is the Capital, one-forty-eighth of it belongs to New York, and if India is part of Jamaica, Washington is also part of New York.

I don't argue with Americans, so why should Americans argue with me.

So one day I went to Washington. I had a bath first. It was Toosday. To be more exact the Second Toosday after Holy Shrimp. That's according to the vegetarian calendar.

However.

A correspondent, whether he is a War Correspondent or a Postwar correspondent has got to see people, people of class, high class.

So I saw: one, The President of the United States, Harry S. Truman, two, Secretary of State, Byrnes.

They didn't see me.

You know how it is at press conferences. The A.P. guy wants to hang from the President's neck so he can get closer to the news and the U.P. guy not wanting to be out-scooped puts his hands into the Secretary of State's pocket and the I.N.S. which is the third service don't care how close the others get so long as I.N.S. gets the story first. Then the networks weave their wires round and when that barbed wire fence is complete, there comes the *New York Times* man nudging the *New York Herald-Tribune*, because a paper has got to keep an eye on policy and advertizing. Then come the funny papers, *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Boston Herald*. Then the Hearse Press, which I think is owned by some firm of undertakers and they've got to get their obituaries right up to time of death. Then come the commercials, *TIME*, *LIFE*, *FORTUNE*. Chiefly Fortune. Then come the *Saturday Evening Post* which is very exclusive. And

Harper's Bazaar, which is run by brothers of the same name or maybe I'm mixing things up. Then comes the *Atlantic*, which is so exclusive no one can get into it and if you get into it, you can't get out of it. And last comes the *Readers' Digest* which is journalism in capsule form, so you don't taste the medicine you're getting.

Then, if there is room, comes the *Bombay Chronicle*. At first they didn't believe there was such a paper, but I told them it was founded by Sir Pherozshah Mehta and edited by Syed Abdulla Brelvi and that went down big in Washington, so they let me in.

They examined my pockets before I went in. I guess they thought I was carrying opium or cocaine or voodoo or something. But all they discovered was a packet of chewing gum, I was a smart reporter and they let me in.

You've got to have chewing gum to be a newspaper man. It gives you ideas. Americans chew gum, like Indians chew betelnut. But Americans don't understand it's the same thing.

From where I was I could clearly see the President's tie. It was light blue in color and a good design. I could also hear him speaking.

I could see more of Mr. Byrnes, but from where I was I couldn't hear him speaking.

But the *Bombay Chronicle* were very pleased with my despatches, because truth is stranger than fiction. I remember once when I covered a musical concert which was assigned to me. I wrote a real good appreciation for my paper and handed it in. The editor was very pleased with my knowledge of music and the way I had written it, with feeling and appreciation. Every item on the programme was covered. He would have sent me to more concerts to report on them, but unfortunately the one I covered had been cancelled without my knowledge, and I lost the chance of covering the others.

But two interviews were two interviews and it's not often a guy from India gets the chance.

Soon I became ambitious. I said to the State Department and the O.W.I. in Washington I'd like to meet a politician also.

Presidential?"

Six questions were enough for fifteen minutes which was my allotted time. I studied them, polished them, improved upon them. I eliminated the superfluous words. I crystallized my points. Cut out the India stuff, I said to myself. Cut out foreign affairs. Cut out Germany and Japan. Cut out the loan to Britain. Cut out De Gaulle and Chiang Kai-shek. Ask him questions about America and affairs American. If he could answer them, every Democrat and every Republican would be cabling for a copy of the *Bombay Chronicle*.

10 o'clock and all was well.

11 o'clock and I started getting down. One never knows when they'll have an elevator strike. Or maybe there'll be no cabs in Washington just this morning. It had happened to me before. This time I was taking no chances. I called at the O.W.I. and re-checked the time, date, month and year of the interview. All was set.

I re-checked once again before leaving the hotel whether I had all I needed for the interview. Did my Parker 51 have the right kind of ink in it? If it failed, was there enough lead in my pencil to carry on? Did I have enough paper to make notes on? Was I wearing the right clothes? Did I have my identity card? Did I? It was all there.

I got to the Post Office at 11-30. I checked whether it was the right Post Office. There's only one in Washington. I checked the right entrance, the right elevator, the right floor, the right reception room, the right receptionist.

At last I was there.

They were waiting for me. I was two minutes ahead of time, but they were ready. Any moment now, the girl said.

11-45 struck and nothing happened. Only two women passed by the chair I was sitting on.

There was no other movement.

The only other person in the room was a statue and I knew Hannegan only saw live men.

11-46 and another two women passed me, but nothing else moved.

The Post Office in Washington was chock-a-block with

women.

I had lost a minute of my interview.
11-47 the clock said. That was bad. Maybe I'd ask one question less.

11-50!

11-55!

12 o'clock! More women passed me. They were going to lunch on time. But the receptionist was still there at the desk, smiling at me for comfort. She was like a nurse with bedside manners.

My face did not change its expression.

It didn't change at 12-30 nor at 12-45 when I got up to go.

A guy's gotta eat sometime. And I was feeling awful hungry.

The girl was worried. Maybe if I waited a little longer, he'd see me for just a minute. At least I could shake hands and say hello. "After all you've come all the way from India," the reception girl said.

"But I've got another appointment," I told her.

"Couldn't that wait."

"I am afraid not."

"Maybe I could call them and say you'd be a little late."

"You can try, lady, but I don't think you can induce a cheese souffle to wait for me. It will just sit down."

"Oh," she said. "Well that's different."

As I said, it was a good interview even though I didn't get the right answers.

There were many other things to see in Washington besides Mr. Hannegan. There was the Lincoln Memorial which said, "All men are created equal on this side of the border."

There was the Washington Memorial, there was Mrs. Esther Van Wagner Tufty, the well-known columnist. There was Hildergarde.

There was the Capitol of course. But everyone knows that. There was also the dame who owned the Hope diamond. Someone asked me, "Is this the first time you've come to this man's town?"

"Man's town!" I said. "There're more women here to

the square inch than there were mosquitoes in Burma. And you know how mosquitoes breed."

But that was my mistake, because "This Man's Town" was another of those Yankee expressions which don't mean what they say. There don't have to be no men in a Man's town. But let's not get into an argument again.

Washington, as you know, was once President of the United States and Hildergarde is half-French, at least her script is.

Mrs. Esther Van Wagner Tufty is half-nothing. She is all there. Six foot and more, like the music of the great composer, powerful and resounding. She supports 26 Michigan papers, but she could support more.

Washington has only one real problem. It's not the problem of the white and the black which is a knotty one down south, it's not the problem of Jew and Arab which exists in the Bronx, it's not the problem of Capital and Labor. The problem of Washington is a problem of distribution: One man to twenty women and the men have to keep their mind on their jobs. It's not like in India where a guy can marry the whole lot and make the children legitimate. In America the State allows you to have legitimate children from one woman at a time. It's too complicated a system. Too many accounts.

So I finished my week in Washington which is as much as one can stay on the entry visa which the Hotel Statler gives you. I returned to New York.

XVII

HOTELS

RETURNED was the wrong word, because when I stood in front of the front desk of the St. Fregis Hotel, no one seemed to remember me. There was no room, they said. Not till Thursday. Today was only Tuesday, what's more it was holy. But Americans don't understand that and when a reception clerk doesn't understand the language of a ten dollar bill, you can bet your life the hotel is really full.

I called up the Waldorf, the Plaza, the Savoy-Plaza, the Algonquin, the Alexandria, the Allerton, the Alpine, the Ambassador, the Amsterdam, the Aristo, the Ashland, the Astor, the Bancroft, the Barbizon-Plaza, the Barclay, the Beacon, the Bedford, the Beekman, the Belmont-Plaza, the Berkshire, the Beverly, the Biltmore, the Blackstone, the Bolivar, the Braddock, the Bristol, the Bryant, the Buckingham, the Byron, the Cameron, the Cardinal, the Carlton Arms, the Carlyle, the Cecil, the Century, the Chalfonte, the Charles, the Chatham, the Christopher, the Churchill, the Claredon, the Claridge, the Colony, the Columbus.

I said to the guy who answered the phone at the Columbus, "Say if Columbus could discover America, couldn't you find a bed for me?"

And he didn't even answer my question.

But I kept phoning. Where are we? Oh yes, we've just done the "C's."

I phoned 57 hotels, after which even the telephone girl was failing in health and as Confucius said "A friend in need is a friend indeed." So I got the idea and rang up Pearl Buck, thinking I'd say, "Miss Buck, I am from the East and want a room for the night in the West. Could you accommodate me?" I'm sure she would have because she was working to bring

everyone from everywhere together and trying to make the Far East come near, at least so that it becomes Near East. But Miss Buck wasn't there. She was probably in China digging more of that damn good earth.

Thinking of the East, I began to think of the Orient. From the Orient I began to think of pashas and potentates and ottomans. Which gave me the right idea. I'd sweat it out the hard way. And there's only one way of sweating it out in New York, the Turkish Bath. So Turkish bath it was. My visit was of national importance.

It was daylight when I found myself still in the Turkish Bath. I ordered breakfast but the coffee was too hot in that steam room and the soft-boiled eggs got hard, or maybe it was because I was feeling soft myself. I went out to a tailor and had my suit altered, the pants taken in round the waist, the collar shortened too because my neck kept falling in.

I stepped out on the broad walks of America's First City and come hail, come rain, come bad weather—and they all came—I was going to sleep in a room that night.

I made it all on my own. It was round 6 p.m. that day. In a hotel between Park and Maddison, Hotel Guam, named after the tragic defeat. It felt like that too. But a bed was a bed and I took it at two dollars and fifty-cents which was two dollars and fifty-cents too much.

Nor did I sleep alone that night. I was scratching hard all the time.

Next morning I picked up a phone in the room and dusted it, so the girl at the other end could hear me clearly.

"Room service please," I said as I was accustomed to say at the St. Fregis.

"Not in the daytime," said a gruff voice.

"I want a cup of coffee," I said ignoring the fatuous remark.

"I give you the bell boy."

There was a sound as of a crane unloading a battleship from an aircraft carrier. Then a voice said, "Bell Captain."

"I want some coffee please."

"What kinda cawfee you want?"

" Any kinda caw... damn... I mean any kind of coffee."

" O.K. I fixya up rightaway."

Twenty minutes later he came up with a tin of Maxwell House Coffee.

" What do I do with it?" I asked. " Put the tin in the bath?"

" I dunno. You want cawfee, so I get you cawfee. What you do is your own business."

" Look, I want a cup of liquid coffee, like you get in a restaurant with milk and sugar inside, all ready to drink."

" You wanna cup of cawfee! Why doncha say so? So I fix you with a cup of cawfee, so what?"

Confucius said, " Sometimes silence is better." Twenty minutes later he brought cawfee. " I got you regulation cawfee," he said looking at my uniform. " See, that's called a carton of regulation cawfee. Next time you say dat and I bring right-away."

" Yeah, I am learning."

" You sho will learn. English aint difficult to lern."

" Yeah."

" Sure."

" Yeah."

" Yeah." It was tiring. Either he must stop or I. I yielded because he wasn't used to it and my jaw couldn't stand the strain.

" Anything else you want?" he said on his own initiative, when I gave him the token of friendship, a quarter.

" Don't tell me you can get me something else? You can? Some fried eggs for instance?"

" Sure."

" O.K. fried eggs."

" No ham?"

" No ham."

" No bacon neither?"

" No bacon neither," I said. " And no shrimp neither also," I added.

" No shrimp? Got none anyway."

" No shrimp. Just fried eggs."

By now I realized he was not so dumb for he was looking round the apartment, which was just a big word for a small thing.

"Just one order?" he asked.

I followed his roving eyes, leant over and looked into the bathroom too, looked under the bed just to make sure and said, "You don't see no one else do you?"

"Don't see no one."

"Well, then just one order," I said.

"Yeah."

"Yeah."

"We wos saying that's kinda funny you didn't ask for companie laast night when youz came in. Maybe he's tired, I sez to the boss."

"What companie?" I said.

"What companie!" he laughed without smiling. "Companie as usual."

"Yeah?"

"Sure. But you didn aask laast night, so maybe youz tired I sez to the boss."

"Can I get company here?"

"Too late now. They kinda gawn to bed in the mornin. But you ask for companie early, say round four o'clock and we feex you up good and proper."

"What can I get?"

"That's kinda up to you, boss. You're the one that gonna have the companie. We bringz what you say. And we bringz accordin what you pay."

"I like it rare," I said.

He laughed again. If he'd only smile at the same time, it would have been funny, I thought.

"Rare! Never heard it called dat before."

"Well, time to lern."

"Yeah! Two fried eggs?"

"No ham?"

"No ham."

"No bacon?"

"And no shrimp."

"And no shrimp! I gotta the idea now. I fix you up good and proper."

All men are created equal, as Lincoln said, except in the brain.

But I got my eggs. Two fried eggs wedded to each other in the frying pan, sunny-side-up, crisp on the sides. They arrived in a paper box, the sort of high-class paper box in which a high-class Department Store delivered an evening gown. There was tissue paper too under the eggs. From his pocket he produced a fork. It may not have come from Mappin and Webb, but you could eat from it. It was clean too. He had made sure by wiping it with his beige handkerchief. At least that's what it looked.

"It's clean, don't worry. Got it out of the laundry only this week," he said to assure me lest I thought his handkerchief was dirty.

"Sure," I said. "I drink Lysol anyway, just to keep my inside clean."

So I ate my two fried eggs without shrimp, without ham and without bacon. Frankly I didn't think he would remember not to bring all three things. That was good going.

"Is that all for the present?"

"Yes, thank you." I knew it called for a quarter. That was trumps for the day.

He thanked me too. "Anytime you want summthin, you just call. I fix you up good and proper."

"Thank you kindly."

"You're welcome. You're O.K. Yeah you're not American but you're O.K."

"Yeah," I said fishing for the eggs in the paper box.

"War Correspondence," he read the shoulder badge on my uniform, which was hanging from a nail on the door.

"Yeah."

"Say, what kinda correspondence is you?"

The door was ajar when he asked me that. He was half in and half out of the room. I said, "Indian."

"Indian!" he said with rare delight and he motioned to come back into the room.

"Naaw," I said. "Not today. I'm too tired. I know. You know all about India. But I don't want to hear it today. I'm tired, see."

"Yeah, some other time I tell you about India," he said to me.

"Yeah, some other time." And I made sure the door was locked when he left the room.

Phew! That was a near thing. Sure was. All day, that day, I persevered with my room-hunt. Hotel Guam was all right for a night in bed, but one got tired of living in a foxhole in Guam, as some of the toughest dough-boys will tell you.

I called every man and woman I knew in New York. I called every hotel.

Perhaps there was a cancellation overnight, perhaps someone had dropped dead. It was not impossible. But nobody had died in a New York hotel that night. I called Washington, I called the O.W.I., I called the State Department, I called . . . well, I called. Finally, someone rang someone else for me and before I knew what had happened I even had a room.

"Move in quick, so you get the room," I was told. I grabbed a cab, rushed to the Guam, grabbed the bell captain on my way up, told him I was checking out rightaway. Would he bring the bags down? Sure he would, he said.

In my foxhole I threw the few odd bits of clothing into my bags. My shaving tackle, my slippers. Oh yes, my green polka-dotted pyjamas.

"Uhuh!" said the Captain.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, it's only pyjamas."

"What did you think they were?"

"Looked like a floosie's dress."

"And what if it was?"

"Gotta report it. Yeah, gotta report it to the boss. Pyjamas is one thing, but dame's dress in a gent's room has gotta be reported."

"But why?"

"Can't do that in this joint."

"But, for heaven's sake! This morning you said I could have company if I wished, didn't you?"

"Sure, but it's gotta come through the proper channels."

"That's fine," said the Right Hand Guy.
So we keep talking, when another guy comes along. He is the Left Hand guy, I guess. He blows his nose with his left hand. And he gets interested in India and I tell him all about the place. How is Mahatma Gandhi? How about dinner?

"Dinner?"

"You know, that Moslem guy."

"Oh, Jinnah! He's fine, fine."

"And how are all the people? And when will India have self-government? And what does India want? And what do the British want? And what kind of independence does India want?" But all intelligent questions. So the half-hour passes, when we're still talking, when another guy walks in, but no one says anything to him and he sits in a chair and reads a couple of letters and says hello and howaya. But we keep talking and he, now and again, joins in with a remark. Nice guy, friendly-like. He is interested in this India-talk and asks questions about me and what I am doing and how life is and how I like New York. And when will India have its independence? And when will *purdah* be abolished? And why I don't eat shrimp, and all kinds of questions. And I like to talk to these chaps, because even though I am really waiting to see only their boss and have a date with him, these guys are human. I say to myself, and if I can spare them a little of my time, why not give them a break too.

So an hour passes, but no one mentions Dr. Trotter any more.

I guess he's held up somewhere or missed the connection. So we talk and I do most of the talking, because these guys seemed anxious to learn.

So an hour and a half passes, when the guy in the chair says he's got to see someone else and would I mind waiting in another room.

"Sure," I say.

What difference does a room make?

So I move into another room. I look at the papers and the pictures and after a while I say to the Right Hand man, "Do you think the Doctor will arrive before lunch?"

"Which Doctor?"

"Dr. Trotter, of course. Don't you remember? I came to see him."

"What do you mean 'Came to see him'? You've seen him. He was talking to you all the time."

"Fancy," I said, "and I'd never have known that."

So before leaving, I look in again at Dr. Trotter's room just so that I'd remember what he looked like.

He was a most outstanding guy. Real he was. You could have spotted him in Times Square on V-J Day, if it wasn't too cloudy.

But Dr. Trotter gave me ideas. Maybe I should go round town stopping people and asking them what they thought about India. It was a great idea.

I put on my uniform next morning round 11 a.m. because a uniform, specially a British one, gives a guy respectability in New York. No dame would ever think a British uniform would ever get fresh with her. Naaw, the British don't do that sort of thing. They don't fraternize, as many an American Red Cross girl who's been posted in Britain will tell you.

I walked down the Avenue, Fifth of course. The sun was shining as in autumn. I was looking for the right type of questionee to launch my poll, for as Dr. Trotter will tell you, you can't have a poll every day.

She came at last. Right out of Saks on Fifth Avenue.

Phew! They don't come like that every day, I said to myself. Tall with sleek blond hair like a mustard-crop, a girdle-shaped, posterior-controlled body, surmounted by a torso like they have on dummies in the best shops. Lips like cupid's bows, skin like alabaster, eye-lashes like hula-skirts.

And . . . I forgot one other thing. Yes, they were there too, like forbidden fruit from a tree in Brooklyn.

Nor was I the only one looking gluedly at her. Two other dames with more age on their shoulders and less elsewhere were looking at her too. One said, catlike to the other, "What on earth is that?"

"A creation," said the other in a meeow sorta way.

But all Gawd's chillen aint got such wings!

So I went up to her.

"Excuse me accosting you," I said with perfect English manners.

She stopped. "You're not costing me anything," she replied.

Then I knew she was unbiased on India. I could start at scratch with her. She was yoga-in-reverse, body over mind.

"I am conducting a sort of Trotter poll. What do you think of India?"

"India?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Listen, I ain't interested in India today or any day. I've been going round town trying to buy myself a pair of Nylons so I can go to a show tonight. And you ask me a damn silly question about India. India!"

She swung around and left me saluting in the correct British Army fashion.

O.K., so what? Maybe I picked the wrong girl. Maybe she ain't interested in India. Maybe she didn't understand what an honour it was to be asked an opinion in a Trotter Poll. Maybe the Nylons were more important.

There were plenty more Americans on Fifth Avenue.

I waited.

Up came a man who was walking in a great hurry. So I stopped him. The only answers that mattered were always the answers given without premeditation.

After the usual formula of introducing myself I said, "What do you think of India?"

"Listen, wiseguy, this ain't no time of practical jokes, see. If you weren't in uniform I'd sock you right here, see. What do I think of India!"

What I couldn't understand was that if Dr. Trotter could do it, why couldn't I?

I stopped a third person. She was a matronly American woman in her early fifties. She was wearing a new fall hat. She had probably just bought it from the shop from which she had come out.

Women at that age have more time on their hands. Telling

her first that I was conducting a Trotter poll, I asked her the same question, "What do you think of India?"

"Young man," she said abruptly. "It took me two hours to find out what I thought of this hat before I bought it. And I can't be bothered to think any more today. India! Well . . ." She looked at me, felt the sort of pity which old women do in wartime for men-in-uniform. "Well . . ." she continued, "I guess I better say something, oughtn't I?"

"I'd be very grateful."

"Well . . ." she said peering over my shoulder and reading aloud, "British War Correspondent. Oh you're British . . . Well, of course I'm agin it."

"A what?"

"I'm agin it which means I am against it."

"Oh!"

"What are you? You're a little . . . what shall I say? . . ."

"Sun-tanned is the polite word, madam," I intervened.

"That's right. You're too swarthy to be an Englishman."

"I am not an Englishman. I am an Indian."

"Oh, that's most interesting. A real Indian?"

"Yes, that's right. Father Indian, mother Indian and I come from India too."

"How extra-ordinary and I come Texas, isn't that extra-ordinary?"

"All the way from Texas."

"No wonder you didn't understand the expression I used —'agin it.' You see Calvin Coolidge used it. Of course you wouldn't know who Calvin Coolidge was. He was one of our Presidents, long before Truman of course. And Coolidge was a man of few words. One day Coolidge went to church, you know like you go to your temples we go to Church. We are Christians. And when he came back from church his wife, that is Mrs. Coolidge of course, said to him, 'Where have you been?' And Coolidge said, 'Church.' Then his wife, the same woman, said 'And what was the sermon on?' And Coolidge replied, 'Sin.' And then she said to him, 'What did he have to say about sin?' And Coolidge said, 'He was agin it.' Now that's very famous in America, but of course you . . ."

I interrupted her and said, "Do you know the other one about Coolidge when one day on a bus a man who was a stranger, recognizing him and wanting to introduce himself, said, 'My name is Smith.' And Coolidge said to the man, 'Mine isn't.'"

"Oh that's very good. Just like Calvin. Now who told you that?"

"Why it's in every book on Coolidge."

"Oh well. It's been a pleasure meeting so enlightened an Indian. My name is Mrs. Jones." She put out her hand. I shook it gracefully.

"Mine isn't," I told her.

I clicked her a salute and moved on. There were thousands of men and women tearing up and down Fifth Avenue that day. They tore up and down that Avenue every day from Monday to Saturday, spring, summer, winter and fall. They never seemed to have enough time. They are either just going someplace or just arrived from someplace.

I watched this motley crowd. I looked carefully at each face and the expression on it. What were they thinking? What were their problems, their pre-occupations? Did they ever pause for thought? No, thinking was not their business. It was done for them by professional thinkers, the men who dished out the world's problems to them in tabloid form. Hadn't anyone told them about India?

Slouching down the Avenue came a Southern gent. He was the type I'd always wanted to have a conversation with. He was a Yeahman with knobs on, the real whoodat type. He had gold in his teeth. He had lips that stood out of his great big jaw, the expression of which only Epstein could have caught. He had a look of vacant grandeur on his face. He was humming a Harlem melody.

"Excuse me," I said to him. "But am I on Fifth Avenue?"

That started a train of thought in his otherwise relaxed brain. He looked round, took stock of himself. He looked at me just to make sure I had asked that absurd question. Then he said, "Yeah man, this sho is Fiff Avenoo. This sho is Fiff

Avenoo. Where dya wantta go?"

"Fifth Avenue," I said.

"Well, you don't have to go far. You're right on Fiff Avenoo."

"Sorry to trouble you, but you see I'm a stranger here."

"Dat's oright boss. No trouble at all."

I probed him more. I told him I came from India, but all I could evoke out of him was a mere, "You don't say!"

"Of course it's a very long way from here."

"Whoodat?"

"I said India is a very long way from New York."

"Yeah, must be."

"What do you think of India?", I shot the question at last.

He thought. He pushed his brown felt hat a little further back and scratched his head. "Yindia!" he exclaimed.

"Yeah."

"Well, what do you think of India?", I persisted.

He thought a little more. Finally he said, "Never did think of Yindia. I guess it's O.K. if you say so."

"But I am asking your opinion."

"Well, I donno, boss. All I knows iz this iz Fiff Avenoo."

"Thanks very much. You've been a great help."

"Youz welcome, boss."

The Southern gent strolled away. He was in no hurry at all. His world was at peace.

One more before I give up, I said to myself. I waited for a good intelligent type. A man, preferably. I saw him come across the street. The traffic lights were against him, so I had time to sum him up. He was wearing one of those off-the-hanger suits, which fitted him like a glove. He had on an American tie judging from the atrociousness of the pattern. He had the usual white shirt which men of his class wear, a felt hat turned down carelessly at the brim. He carried a briefcase. He wore glasses too.

I thought quickly and decided that he'd need the smart American slick approach. When he came over to my side of the pavement, I stopped him and without any apology or intro-

duction said, "I'm conducting the Trotter Poll and the question is 'What do you think of India?'"

"Not much," he said in cold blood and moved away.

I stood rooted where I was. I was all "Boined up."

XIX

AMERICA ON INDIA

BURNED up but unbeaten I was determined to find out something of what this continent thought of India. Maybe I could find it in an article, maybe in a book.

Walking down Fifth Avenue, I saw a great big bookshop, the sort of shop where the right sort of books sell. Besides, it stood on Fifth Avenue, so it was a guarantee that the right sort of people bought here also. It's name was Scribners.

As I walked into the shop, a sprightly attendant wearing what looked like an apron came to serve me. I said I'd like a book on India, the latest she had, because it was only fair to gather American thought and opinion from the latest books on the subject and not one which was antiquated.

"The latest," she said and looked at one with a pretty cover which stood on the shelf in front of us. *Here Is India* by Jean Kennedy, published also by Scribners. "Here is one just out but it's for juveniles," the attendant said.

"What juveniles?"

"American juveniles, of course."

"That's just right for me, because I want to find out what America thinks of India."

"Then that's the book for you."

I bought it and took it home. The dust jacket ran all round the book. On the front there was a picture of an elephant gaily decorated with gold trimmings and covered with a rich Persian carpet. Its(the elephant's) long white teeth were bright and shiny as if they'd been brushed with Pepsodent. On the elephant's back in a gold chair sat three turbaned Indian gents. The background was of a court in a palace and leading the elephant were four men, also turbaned. In fact all, except the elephant, wore turbans.

On the spine of the book was the title sprawled all down its

demi-size. On the back, behold there was our old friend, the fakir on spikes, but for some obscure reason he was a trifle streamlined with a bright red umbrella such as one would buy from one of New York's leading stores, if they had any. Walking with her back to the reader was an Indian woman with a jug on her head. She showed her back, obviously because of the *purdah* system. And in the background was a street scene, empty, desolate, all except for a cow, and the cow was all right except that it hadn't any udders.

The inner flaps of the dust jacket contained the publishers' blurb. It said, "Jean Kennedy gives us here a preview of what we may see when we visit India She has succeeded in giving us the 'feel' of the country."

Eagerly I opened the pages. It was copiously illustrated. The first picture that caught my eye was captioned, "Gandhi with a Chinese disciple." It was really good. There was a young Chinese ardently looking at an Indian with horn-rimmed glasses drinking a cup of tea presumably. That would obviously tell the juvenile American of Gandhi's international appeal. It would be publicity for Gandhi in juvenile America, but if any Indian reader ever saw the picture, he'd be a little confused trying to find Gandhi in the picture or anywhere in the book. The man drinking tea with the Chinese disciple was C. Rajagopalachari, the ex-Premier of Madras.

But what did it matter so long as the idea was there?

Jean Kennedy's telling of India's vast population was unique. As quotations from the book require the publisher's permission, I'll have to tell it in my own words. Apparently the people of India were counted all in one night in March, 1941. Of course, it being dark at night in India, the author explains that in the great cities they were counted by electric light, in the smaller towns by lantern light, in remote villages by the smoky flame of oil lamps, the fisherman's huts by moonlight, which supposes that on the particular night in March 1941 the moon was switched full on. There were all sorts of other lights, too innumerable to mention here, but the fact remained that the census-takers of India, supermen of the East, counted the whole lot on that night in March, 1941, for "When morning came,

the men, women and children had been counted. They were 388,997,955."

Not even a tabulator, such as those used in modern New York counting houses, would have done the job so fast, so accurate and so well.

I guess the census-takers were a little tired in the morning after that night in March, 1941.

The most perfect picture in the book entitled, "The scenic beauty of the Himalayas . . ." was a most beautiful picture of a tree-covered hill. The Himalayas had disappeared from the background.

The picture of "A veiled Moslem woman" was superb. On a pitch black background, hanging in what appeared to be mid-air was the white box which was all carefully adjusted. Inside was the Indian woman, so the author said. The whole style effect was definitely ahead of Bergdorf and Goodman, which was good for India, but there was no guarantee that there was a real Indian woman sitting inside the white *purdah*.

It was one of the most artistic reports I had read of India.

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XX

ON WHAT WAS LEFT OF ME

BY this time my health was failing. I was hardly the same man who had arrived on the *Queen Bess* that summer morning.

I was beginning to get worried about the state of my mind, I kept seeing pink elephants when there was nothing really to see.

My appetite was dwindling.

I sent for a New York doctor. He said there was nothing wrong with me. It was only a touch of *impressario falsa*, he said and prescribed Scotch as an alternative to the Bourbon I was drinking.

Doctor's fees and medical attendance were costing me my shirt. So I left New York and America. I brought my pants back.